







Chapter 1: Elopement Trip

“...Eh? You’re actually not into guys?”

On the 13th of August, when these words were directed at me, I spit out the barley tea in my mouth at full speed.

“H-Hey! What are you doing!?” A sharp voice reached me from the kitchen.

The owner of this voice had her wavy hair in two beautiful twintails, possessing a slender figure. She wore a yellow apron above her summer-esque clothes. She’s a fellow second-year at Rouran Academy, with the name Usami Masamune. And right now, she threw a dust cloth at me.

“Hurry and clean it up, it’ll leave stains.”

“...Yeah yeah.” I said while catching the dust cloth, and wiped the floor clean.

Can’t dirty other people’s homes after all. And yes, I was currently visiting Usami Masamune’s private residence. She was renting a small room in a flat located inside the city I was living in. If one wondered why I was here on a visit, then let me tell you. I’m here to fulfill the promise we made on the day of the culture festival. Namely, that I would get to eat her homemade food.

“You stupid chicken, I went as far as to make you something cold for this heat, so why’d you waste it like that?” Masamune complained as she stirred up the vegetables in the hot pot.

No matter how I think about it, that’s all your fault for suddenly blurting out something weird like that. How could I keep my mouth shut, you know.

Today is the 13th of August, and we find ourselves in the middle of the currently ongoing summer break. The early summer period had long passed by, and was in its last stage before it would leave us until

next year. Instead, the days were full with agonizing temperatures and unbearably hot days that could make the asphalt melt—Mid-summer has come upon us.

Not to mention that it apparently was much hotter compared to last year, the asphalt heating up and creating hot air down on the ground, treating us humans like we were raw BBQ meat. Even just walking all the way over here took all of my mental strength.

“Also, why today of all days?”

Calling me over on a hot summer day, not to mention during the hottest time of the day, at noon...Not to mention that promise has happened almost a month ago. Well, at least I can sit here in a cool room thanks to that A/C.

“I-I can’t help it, can I. I had to prepare a lot of stuff. And, I didn’t know what to make...” Masamune averted her gaze from me, and faced the pot again.

You say preparations, but...an entire month?

“Not to mention that you had me wait in front of the room for an entire hour, letting me boil outside.”

“Urk...Shut up, stupid chicken! I had to prepare, so I had to prepare!”

“Again with that...”

Then, what? You told me to not be late when you send me the place and time, and yet this is what I get? I seriously doubt I’m wrong, but...were you trying on clothes until the bare limit? I mean, I can literally see how much attention she put into her appearance. I’m wearing a bland t-shirt and jeans, whereas she’s wearing a cute pink camisole with a white miniskirt. Adding to that her tight knee-socks that were glued to her slender and healthy legs...I seriously didn’t know where to look. She feels different from how she always does at school, and...it’s not half bad. More than that though...

“Say, can I ask one thing?”

“What? Got even more complaints?”

“No. I was just wondering, didn’t you say that you were living a fairly poor lifestyle?”

When we went on that date during the school festival, she said that bread with mayonnaise was delicious and whatnot...

“That’s right. It’s not something I enjoy talking about, but I’m poor. I’ll have you pay for all the ingredients I bought today.”

“I don’t mind, but...what about the rest then?”

“...What do you mean?”

“I mean, look at your place. This is bound to be an expensive room, right.” I said, and looked around me.

It was an awfully large room, big enough to hold a small party, together with an expensive ceiling, expensive furniture, and a modern kitchen. Not to mention that I couldn’t see a bed anywhere, which meant that she had a separate bedroom. Add to that the monitor and automatic lock at the entrance of the flat, and the fact that this room was located on the 11th floor, namely the highest, right in the corner.

Honestly, this feels like I wandered into the land of the bourgeoisie. If you call this poor, then Yamanue no Okura, the famous poet about poverty, will come for your head with a time machine.

“I can’t help it. This was the best property.”

“The best? I mean, the convenience of location here is superb, but still.”

I finished wiping the floor, and continued the conversation as I sipped on more tea. This is a great location, indeed. It’s close to the train station, and not too far from the school.

“Not quite. Although you’re right, this location is pretty great.” Masamune explained with a somewhat bragging tone.

It’s not that? A question mark popped up above my head as I tilted my head, when Masamune explained with a happy grin.

“Fufu, can’t help it then, I’ll explain it to you, stupid chicken. Right here is a wonderful location. The conditions are great, the room is beautiful, and the furniture is clean and proper. However, that’s not the most charming point about this. The greatest driving force for picking this place—was the rent.”

“...Rent?”

“Yup. The rent here is super cheap. Without the security deposit, it’s 4.000 yen a month.”

Hearing those words, I once again lost my calm. This time however, the tea didn’t come spurting out of my mouth, but rather my nose. I might just join a circus in the future.

“Wah, what are you doing? Do you have some barley tea allergy?”

“Shut up! This isn’t some reaction towards the tea!”

What kind of odd disposition would that be? Even someone who has gynophobia like me is shocked to hear that. No, that’s not important right now, alright.

“...Masamune-san, isn’t 4.000 yen a month a bit unrealistic?”

Not to mention with no security deposit...in such a high-class flat. What kind of deflation is going on?

“I mean, I was shocked at first myself, but...hearing out the reason, it made sense.”

“Reason?”

“Yup. No matter who moved into this place, they would move out in a month.”

“.....”

Even though it was already August, I felt an incredible chill on my skin. I want to believe that this is the A/C working a bit too well, but that sadly wasn’t the case.

“The real estate agent told me that, around two years ago, the woman who lived here was...you know.”

“I don’t know!?”

“Eh? Stupid chicken, you’re curious?”

“No, I’m fine! I’ll take back what I said!”

“2am at night...cheating boyfriend...growing frustration...knife... hanging by the neck...”

“Kyaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!?”

“Wah, you don’t need to scream like that. I was joking. I don’t know the circumstances, but it’s a fact that she did that.”

“.....”

“Anyway, that’s what it is. All of the people who lived here before moved soon after.”

“They all moved...”

So this is like... a possessed property?

“I heard stories like ‘She’ll crawl up to your pillow at 3am’ or ‘Even though I was living on my own, there would be a cup on the desk when I came home’ or ‘I could never take any pictures in this room for some reason’ and so on.”

“...H-Huh.”

“Well, they said that such supernatural things happened. Some people even ran away during the night. Eventually, the rent reached a low price like that.”

“A-Are you okay with living in such a room?”

“Totally. I don’t believe in that sort of stuff.”

“That’s the problem!?”

“They’re just exaggerating anyway. I found some weird papers hung up inside the closet of my bedroom.”

“Papers?”

“They had ‘Evil spirit, be exorcised!’ written on them.”

“Pretty easy to understand if you ask me!”

Also, do these things even help!? Well, if they did, then the previous inhabitants probably wouldn’t have left.

“I took them off since they were in the way though.”

“You took them off!?”

“They’re not cute at all, so I took them out with the burnable trash.”

“Get them back right now!”

“Too late, I did that a year ago. Also, nothing really happened even after I took them off.”

“Nothing really happened...”

“Once night came around, it just showed some weird ‘Tonight it’s you’ on the TV screen, that’s about it.”

“Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!?”

That’s pretty big if you ask me! Makes sense why I was feeling nervous the second I walked inside of here. I thought it was because I entered the room of a girl, but it was because of this eerie atmosphere.

“What, are you scared?”

“A-A bit, I guess? Our family isn’t doing too great with all this occult stuff.”

Our family’s education system might be like ‘Children of the wind’ or ‘Terminator!’, but against things physical violence doesn’t work, we’re terrified. I’m already having trouble with it, but if Kureha

catches wind of any stories like that, she won't be able to sleep all night, and snuggled into my bed while hugging her pillow and crying. She sure can be delicate at the weirdest times.

"I'm a bit scared of course, but I think I'll be able to take this a bit longer."

"You're pretty admirable, you know that."

"Hmpf, I don't want to hear that from the guy who's being used as his little sister's punching bag every morning."

Well, she's not wrong. There's a ghost haunting this place, and a little sister hunting me every morning. It's hard choosing which is worse. Maybe my little sister is being possessed already? Satan, that you?

"Wait a second, didn't you say that you're getting the bare minimum of living expenses from your parents?"

Masamune mentioned that she was living alone because of her family's circumstances, but she should at least get money for living expenses and rent.

"You're right, but...I don't want to use that."

"You don't want to use that?"

"I need to earn my own money. Since I found a new part-time job, I should be fine. I did already use some, but once I'll find a proper job in the future, I'll pay it all back." Masamune said with a determined tone.

.....Damn, how can she be so cool? Her thought process is so stoic, so gung-ho, it makes me want to respect her despite us being the same age. Since I've only seen people like Suzutsuki and Konoe, blessed by their surroundings, it's a refreshing sight to see someone actually try this hard. It makes me want to support her. I guess I need to learn from her.

"Here, it's done." Masamune brought me a plate with the food on it, as well as a small rice bowl.

...Hm? This menu...

“...Hurry up and eat. You told me to treat you, right?”

“Well, yeah...But, why this?”

The food steaming on the plate in front of me...was meat and potato stew.

“I read in a book that all boys like meat and potato stew.”

“What kind of book was that? That’s so old-fashioned.”

“Urk...It said so, okay...Or, do you just not want to eat the food I made?”

“Come on...”

Don’t look at me like you’re about to cry. That makes it seem like I’m bullying you.

“...I get it already.”

It seemed like she might actually break out in tears if I said I wouldn’t eat it, which is why I picked up some of the meat, and carried it to my mouth. Thanks for the food.

“...Hm?”

Oh, this is surprisingly...No, pretty delicious. The seasoning isn’t too strong, and the meat is comfortably soft, and so are the onions. Not to mention that the shirataki noodles are adding a delicious taste to it.

“...How is it?” Compared to Masasmune’s usual confident tone, she sounded quite worried this time.

Looking over, she practically stared at me in wait.

“It’s pretty delicious. This is even good enough that you could cook for a restaurant.” I said, and grabbed some rice next.

It was perfectly boiled, making it not too soft but also not too hard.

Man, she might actually be good at cooking...

“R-Really. Then, praise me more!” Masamune let out a sigh, and reached for some stew herself.

Ain't she honest now. She probably was equally happy as she was embarrassed to have her cooking praised. I can see her blushing. Still, 'praise me more', huh. Should I be screaming something like 'It's a revolution of taste!' to fully satisfy her? I might just get kicked instead. Well, anything is better than nothing.

“Hey, Usamin.”

“What, stupid chicken.”

“Don't be so cold. This meat and potato stew is pretty great. I'd love to make you my wife.”

Right after hearing my words, Masamune's face turned beet red. More accurately, she spit out the rice she had in her mouth, and threw a coughing fit as she gasped for air.

“...Y-You say some weird things, huh!”

“Weird things? For example?”

“T-The part of you wanting to make me your wife!”

“? What's so weird about that?”

I mean, it's not like I have any excellent cook making food for me at home. If she was cooking for me, then...Hm? Wait, she feels more like a housekeeper than a wife now. But, she'd probably step on me if I said that.

“Sorry, I chose the wrong words.”

“Right! That's just taking it too far!”

“Yeah. A wife is too much. Rather than that...Yeah, I'd love to have you as a maid.”

Right as I finished my words, a table-wiping cloth slapped me in the face—Gaaah, what is this woman doing! I even tried to fix myself!

“Idiot! Stupid chicken! Why are you saying all these lewd things now!”

“Lewd things?”

“It’s a maid, you know!? Wearing nothing but an apron, saying ‘Please forgive me, Master!’, right!?”

“What kind of fantasies are you having!?”

“Eh? Wait...you want me to say ‘Welcome home, Master’ as well?”

“No!”

“Jeez, telling me to say ‘Would you like a bath? Dinner? Or rather... me?’ is taking it too far...”

“It really surprises me just how rotten your thoughts can get!”



I totally forgot. This is Usami Masamune we're talking about. All her thoughts and ideas are just cursed.

"Sorry, I was wrong, so please let's just switch the topic."

This is a shared living district. The walls are probably not that thin, but if someone happened to overhear this conversation, they would surely get the wrong idea.

“Y-Yeah. Right, then...” Masamune thought about something. “You are into guys, right?”

“.....”

...Oh right. So we're going back to that, huh. That rumour is still going around even now—namely that Sakamachi Kinjirou is into guys.

“Listen, I don't know how many times I have to say this, but I'm not into guys, I don't enjoy BL.”

“But...aren't you going out with Subaru-sama...”

“No, that's not...”

Oh yeah, I did say that before, although it was all to protect Konoe's secret. Konoe Subaru is the crossdressing butler of the only daughter of the academy's board chairman, Suzutsuki Kanade. Since she has some annoying circumstances that would make it troublesome if someone found out about her being a girl, I lied and said that we were two guys dating.

Hmm...this is pretty complicated. If I wanted to clear up that misunderstanding, I would have to reveal the fact that Konoe is a girl...As I was thinking on how to solve this situation, Masamune suddenly muttered a faint ‘...Yeah’.

“I get it. I don't want to be too meddlesome. Everybody has one or two secrets they can't tell other people.”

“.....”

It seems like I somehow convinced her without even saying anything. That probably caused another unwelcome misunderstanding, but whatever. As long as Konoe's secret is safe, the results don't matter.

“Ah, there's one more thing I want to ask...Can I?” She spoke up with a somewhat anxious tone.

“Sure. As long as it's not related to me being gay.”

“...T-Then, I’ll ask.” She took a faint breath. “Is it true that you confessed to Suzutsuki Kanade during the school festival?”

“.....”

That damn nasty rabbit. Why is she trying to dig up trauma after trauma.

“...Masamune. This is just a story between us, but that confession was nothing but lies. It was the only possible choice I had if I wanted to survive that situation.”

I was about to be attacked by more than a hundred Subaru-sama fanclub members. I didn’t want to confess like that either, but it’s better than dying. Though I didn’t expect to get rejected that harshly, alright.

“R-Really!? ...Ahh, thank god.”

“? Why do you sound so glad?”

“! N-No reason! Don’t mind me!” Masamune said, as she gulped up her tea in one go.

I wonder, did they ever personally meet? Suzutsuki is the leader and founder of the Subaru-sama Fanclub [S4] at Rouran, and Masamune was a member of that. If so, then it wouldn’t be weird for them to have met...Then again, I doubt they could get along.

“Anyway, we finished eating, so let’s start.”

Right as I was thinking that, Masamune swiftly stood up.

“Hm? Are we going to exorcise that spirit or something?”

We should at least bring a priest from the nearby shrine with us. Then again, I don’t have much faith in that shrine, I never get a good fortune slip after all. By the way, this year I got an ill fortune concerning women. Said something like ‘You should not get involved with women this year’ or the likes. Seriously? You tell me that now? I’ve always had bad luck with women, thanks to my family. I bet it must have been the same even in my previous life.

“What are you talking about, stupid chicken. I’m talking about your treatment.”

“Treatment?”

“Treatment to fix your gynophobia of course. Just leave it to me. I came up with the perfect program.” Masamune puffed out her chest as she explained.

Ahhh, she did say something like that before. Though she never brought it up after the school festival incident, so I completely forgot.

“Before we start your treatment, there’s one thing I want to confirm. Whenever you touch a girl, your body reflexively generates a nosebleed, and at the worst times, you lose consciousness, right?”

“Yeah, although it pains me to admit it. Also, when it’s direct skin contact, the symptoms activate much faster and easier.”

Of course, the time it takes for me to get an actual nosebleed and faint depends on my own physical and mental condition, so it really is more case by case.

“Hmm, I see. Then, my treatment program should work just fine.

“You sure about that? I don’t want you shocking me everytime my symptoms activate.”

“No problem. I won’t do something dangerous like that.”

Right after, a shock ran through my body nonetheless. Shockingly enough—Masamune suddenly put her hand on the zipper of her miniskirt.

“Y-Y-Y-You! What are you doing!?”

“Eh? I’m taking it off, can’t you see? Kya, don’t stare at me like that~”

“Shut up, you stupid rabbit!”

When a girl my age suddenly starts stripping, there’s no way I can

look away...Wait, that's not it! Calm down, calm down. This ain't the time to act like some adolescent horny teenager. However, the skirt already dropped to the ground, revealing Masamune's slender legs, and her thick thighs. Of course, not to forget her faintly purple underwear. Her entire body was...

"...Wait a second?"

I feel like this looks more like a swimsuit rather than underwear...

"Got you good, huh? Sorry to say this, but this is a swimsuit. Our club is going to the sea for a training camp, so I bought a new swimsuit with the money I earned from my part-time job. How does it look? Shocked, hm?" Masamune laughed like a child that just succeeded with a prank.

This nasty rabbit, I swear. Please, someone use the A/C to cool down this room some more. Global warming? Don't care. I need to cool down my head first and foremost.

"Here we go."

With these words, Masamune put her hands on her upper clothing, and pulled that off in one smooth motion. She took off her kneesocks as well and finished changing completely. What appeared was a faint purple wire bikini. The color looked great on her. The pearls on the tip of the string were cute, and with Masamune's overall slender body, it emphasized her chest...Oh man.

"And? Does it look good on me?"

Masamune seemed to be embarrassed herself, as her cheeks were colored in a faint red, and she started fidgeting. Oh crap, I might actually be the one in danger right now.

"Y-Yeah, it really fits you."

For now, I decided to go with an honest compliment. Can't go 'It's a revolution of taste!' out of context.

"R-Really? Thanks. I wanted to get another person's opinion before going on the training camp."

“Training camp...with the handicrafts club?”

Kureha started preparing her stuff yesterday after all. Apparently they'll be gone on an uninhabited island for a week, holding a survival training camp. Can't shock me with that anymore, I heard enough about your handicrafts club during Golden Week. They'll probably go hunting sharks during that week.

“Also, why are you leaving tonight? Wouldn't early in the morning be better?”

According to Kureha, their departure would be at midnight. She said something like ‘We're leaving as we're shrouded in darkness! So exciting!’ or whatever, but I still think it's hella weird.

“Apparently the school wouldn't give permission, so we're doing it in the shadows.”

“So what about the budget and transportation?”

“That's why we're doing it late at night. Um...according to the ‘Funnies Summer Training Camp Guidebook’, we'll be sneaking into a transport truck at 1am, and moving with that. At 2am, the truck will deliver its goods to a carriage ship, so we'll be switching to that. Once we get close to the island, we'll steal one of the lifeboats...”

“Enough, Masamune. The more I hear, the more nervous I get.”

What a terrifying handicrafts club, really. What they're doing is getting close to human trafficking. Not even some secret agents go through the lengths they do. As an older brother, I shall pray for the safe return of my little sister.

“Oh yeah, why did you buy a new swimsuit? Didn't you literally buy a new one like two months ago?”

“Ahh, that competitive swimsuit? That would have been fine, but I figured that wouldn't be usable for your treatment.”

“.....”

That moment, a fierce storm filled my heart, like I stood in the

middle of a guerilla warfare battlefield. I got a horrible premonition. This treatment program she's thinking of, she's not...

"Now, let's get this started, stupid chicken. Do your best—and **bear with it.**"

I tried to escape, but I was too late. Like a rabbit jumping into the air, the girl clung to me as her twintails shook left and right.

"...!? You wench!"

"Fufu, how is this? This will surely fix your gynophobia, right?" While grinning from ear to ear, Masamune tightly wrapped her arms around my back.

I felt something with the consistency of two marshmallows being pressed onto my chest, sending shivers down my spine. She's not wrong...! If she keeps doing this, I'll be literally forced to get used to a girl's body...!

"You damn rabbit! This is more like shock treatment than anything!"

"Wha...what are you talking about! I'm ignoring my own embarrassment to help you! Can't you see how serious I am!?"

"What do you mean serious!? This training is harsher than anything the old man from 'Star of the G*ants¹' used!"

"I can't pull back now! See, I bought a swimsuit that had a lot of open skin so you could directly feel me!"

"That's why!?"

"I'm super embarrassed, you know? It took me an entire month to muster up the courage to actually do such a thing."

"So that's why it took so long!?"

It was all just to gain herself more time!? Damn it, I didn't think she'd actually prepare a swimsuit like this...!

"...Hm?"

Wait a second. She talks about direct touch of skin, but...

“Hey, Masamune. Even if you wear revealing clothes so that we get as much skin contact as possible...doesn't that lose all meaning since I'm still wearing my clothes?”

Right now, I'm still wearing my t-shirt, being clung to by Masamune in her bikini style. Strictly speaking, we're not touching skin on skin here...

“...Ah.”

Because of my words, Masamune's mouth opened in shock, like she just reached a revelation. Following that, her eyes started to grow teary, with her body quivering, as she tightly closed her lips.

“Y-You were aiming for this, right!?”

“No no no no! You're just an idiot!”

“Shut up, stupid chicken! This just means I was stripping my clothes off for nothing!”

“Even if you get angry at me for that, it's not my fault!”

“Ah, right. As long as I just forcefully strip you...”

“Don't you daaaare!”

While she still clung to me, we dashed along the floor. Even if this is summer-themed, I don't want to pull off some festival dance with her. I would have preferred some of those Hawaiian fire dances.

“Gueh!?”

Around the area of my nose, I felt something warm. At the same time, I got goosebumps all over my body. Undoubtedly, these were the symptoms of my gynophobia. Even if my t-shirt is blocking off a lot, if she desperately clings to me like that, it's only a matter of time until I break down.

“Y-You! Let go already!”

“W-Why! Are you saying that my treatment isn’t worth anything!?”

“I never said that, did I!”

“So what’s the problem...Ah, my breasts!? Are my breasts not good enough for you!?”

“Where did that even come from!?”

“How cruel...You don’t know how bothered I am by it...I’m drinking milk every day, you know.”

“What am I supposed to do with that information!?”

Also, I think your size is big enough that you don’t need to worry about...Wait, this isn’t the time for that! My consciousness is starting to fade. At this rate, I’ll get a nosebleed, and pass out—

“.....Okay, that should do it.”

Masamune seemed to have seen how my HP was chipping away, and moved her body away from me...Too friggin close. A bit more, and I would have greeted my old man up in heaven. Not funny in this current season either. I might have ended up in a grave, with Masasmune visiting me. Luckily, it seems like I can make it to the graveyard alive this year.

Well, as long as I’m alive, everything’s well. As this death flag was vanishing from above my head, I let out a relieved sigh.

“Stupid chicken, how long are you going to lie on the ground like that?” A sharp voice came raining down on me.

When I raised my head, standing there was Usami Masamune. Because of our previous exchange, she was gasping for air, as she glared down at me with a somewhat sadistic expression.

“...10 sets.”

“...Huh?”

“Like I said, we’ll do this 10 more times. If this didn’t fix it, then we

can just keep doing it over and over, endlessly.”

“E-Endlessly...”

“Ah, no doing lewd things, okay. If you try anything like that, I’ll do something even more amazing and make you lose consciousness in an instant.”

“.....”

“Don’t worry, I’m embarrassed myself, but this is to fix your gynophobia, so I’ll put up with it. We’re...friends after all.”
Masamune nodded to herself, as if she wanted to convince herself.

Limbo—For some reason, this odd and old-fashioned word popped up in my head. In front of me was Masamune, already in a diving hug towards me. I remember...Today is the 13th of August—Friday. I should have realized when I left my home...that today of all days is Friday the 13th.

♀ × ♂

This might be sudden, but the fact that cicadas only fly during the 7th day seems to be a superstition. In reality, it’s hard to witness grown cicadas in breeding, but there seem to be those who fly even every month. Well, even if they were to only fly on the 7th day, I bet they would enjoy their lives much more than I am right now.

“...Hot.”

These words escaped my lips when I was hit by a heat wave the second I stepped out of the mansion. Although my feet definitely landed on the scorching hot asphalt, I couldn’t help but staggering. Must be anemia. After my hellish treatment by Doctor Masamune ended, I judged that in my current state, it would be best to head home directly.

Not even a batter who made it to the Japanese baseball national series would have tagged along until the end there. Not to mention that every time she clung to be, I got a nosebleed. At the very end, Masamune acted all satisfied, saying ‘...Alright, this should have helped a lot with your chicken disposition’, but it’s honestly terrifying

how everything she did had the opposite effect. Even going along with a certain bratty shogun's morning training isn't as exhausting as this.

The time was currently 3pm in the afternoon. The heat outside was at its highest today. Walking outside right now is pretty much getting close to torture, but I just had to escape from this hellish mansion as quickly as possible.

"Urk..."

Unable to bear with the brightly shining sun, I narrowed my eyes as I walked along. At this rate, I might just collapse from the anemia and a heat stroke, also known as the worst possible combination. It feels like all the blood I have left in me is vaporizing. I wanted to refill some of my lack of water, so I headed to a vending machine at a street corner. To me, it looked like an oasis in the middle of the Sahara.

Now then, what should I get...I took out my wallet to check how much money I had on me, but shockingly enough, I only had 20 yen with me. Shit, I thought I could treat myself to something great, but I didn't even have enough money on me. That meat and potato stew just cost me too much.

"...Damn it."

Guess I have to put up with it until I get back. With this determination in mind, I once again set foot onto the burning asphalt. Luckily, if I walk a bit more, I'll be in my neighbourhood again, so there's hope. Once I get back, everything will be okay. After all, Kureha will be gone for her training camp starting today. Not to mention the entire week. That means that the paradise I had lost during Golden Week will befall on me once again, only even better.

And, this year's summer break is special for me as well. After all, Mom won't be home either. My dear main provider made every single summer break of my life a different type of hell. It would be training from morning to evening. Last year, I complained 'It's already this hot, just let me go!' with tears in my eyes, she then took me to her summering residence Sakhalin² for a training camp, which

is located to the north of Hokkaido. When she told me ‘Go snatch some of the Russian army’s food supplies!’, I genuinely thought my blood was going to freeze.

That’s why I’ll definitely use this summer break for my own freedom, and enjoy myself thoroughly. It’ll probably be over soon enough just by relaxing at home or having fun with Kurose and classmates, but it’s better than anything I ever experienced, so I won’t let anybody take this from me...!

These thoughts filled my head, so I put up with my dry throat aching, and walked my way beneath the burning sun, when—

“...Jirou, want a sip?” Suddenly, an alto voice spoke up next to me.

I turned towards the voice in shock, only to find a classmate looking at me with a refreshed expression despite this heat. Her translucent eyes shone brightly, as her orange hair glittered being shone on by the sun. To counter the heat, she wore a half-sleeved shirt with a necktie, together with boyish half-pants below that, just emphasizing her slender stature—Konoe Subaru.

She is the number one prince at our school, as well as a butler, and now offers me a sports drink.

“...Thanks.” I said, and accepted the sports drink, gushing it down my throat without any hesitation.

Mm, perfect. It had a bit of a weird taste, but maybe it’s some new product?

“Thanks a bunch. But, why are you here?”

Looking around, I couldn’t find her master Suzutsuki around. Normally those two always move together, but maybe they have different business.

“I had some business at your place, Jirou.”

“My place? Why?”

“It’s not that big of a deal, but...” For some reason, Konoe awkwardly

averted her gaze.

It's not about the summer homework, is it? Sadly, I won't be bothered with that for a while, I want to enjoy my peaceful days. Don't remind me, please.

"Leaving that aside..." There, Konoe suddenly gave me a serious gaze. "What about you, Jirou...what were you doing around here?"

"...Eh?" Subconsciously, I was now the one to look away.

Standing in front of me was Subaru-sama, staring directly into my soul, freezing every part of my body.

"Not to mention that you smell of stew."

"!"

"And, I get the stench of another girl from you."

"Seriously!?"

"...Jirou, were you meeting with someone behind my back?" Butler-kun would not dare take her eyes away from me.

I could feel sweat running down my cheeks, but I doubt this was because of the summer heat...What should I do, I feel like it would be better to not tell Konoe about what I just experienced. What would happen if I carelessly said 'A girl wearing a swimsuit was clinging to me in a secluded room until my nose started bleeding', huh? She'd think I had gotten crazy from the heat.

Not to mention that Konoe doesn't exactly think positively of Masamune. First it was simply because she was the reason for my fight with Konoe during the school festival, but I feel like there's a different reason for Konoe's recent hostility. For example, I sometimes would eat lunch with Masamune, but that would leave Konoe in a seriously bad mood. Well, she might dislike the idea of having her friend taken away by someone else, I guess. Either way, I need to keep what happened today a secret...

"...Well, whatever."

“Eh?”

To my surprise, Konoe stopped her attack.

“You have your own private life after all. I don’t want to dig into other people’s secrets, as that is what it means to be a polite butler.” Konoe showed a confident grin, as she puffed out her chest.

...I’m saved. With a relieved sigh, I wiped away the cold sweat on my body. I can’t lose any more liquid or I will die of dehydration.

“Oh yeah, what business were you talking about?”

I mean, she came over personally, and didn’t just call me, so I figured it must have been something important...

“Yeah. The thing is, there is something I need to tell you...” There, Konoe took a deep breath. “—Let’s run away together.”

“.....Huh?”

Hearing these words was too big of a shock for me, I was at a loss. Run away? Is this what I think it is? The type of elopement a man and woman do when their marriage isn’t being accepted? But, why Konoe and me? We’re not even dating.

“I know that what I’m saying comes out of the blue, but I need you, Jirou.” Konoe approached me with an upwards gaze.

It might just be my imagination, but her eyes looked oddly dampened...Hey hey hey, what kind of situation is this? Konoe would always have a dignified expression, so seeing her this flustered is just more nerve-wracking. And the sizzling heat around me didn’t help much with not making me dizzy.

“...Huh?”

There, I lost all strength in my knees. W-Weird, I was feeling just fine not too long ago...

“...It’s fine, you’ll just get a bit sleepy.” Konoe nodded as she looked

at me.

T-That wench, did she...!

“Y-You...”

I tried asking her, but I couldn't muster up enough strength to do so. It must have been that sports drink just now, right? Damn it, I should have stayed in that cursed flat instead. But, there's no way that Konoe would do such a thing out of her own desire. If so, then the mastermind should be...

“Apologies, Jirou.” Konoe gave me an apologetic gaze. “A butler can't go against their master.”

I heard these words as my consciousness was drifting away.

“.....”

I knew it. Rather than some ghost, that damn rich lady is much more terrifying.

1 A baseball manga – Star of the Giants

2 A Russian island

Chapter 2: Beachside Baby

“Good morning, Jirou-kun. How are you feeling?”

The moment I opened my eyes, I heard a dignified voice. When my eyes finally focused, I saw the smile of a certain rich lady—Suzutsuki Kanade. She was looking directly at my face.

“.....”

Well, I guessed as much.

“...Suzutsuki-san, can I ask one thing?”

“What might that be, Jirou-kun?” She smiled gently.

I took a deep breath, and continued.

“...Why are you looking like that?”

“Eh? What’s wrong with it? Does it not look good?”

“No, that’s clearly not the problem here.”

The rich lady grinned with a teasing smile—while wearing a yukata. It looked like the type you wore in an inn or hotel, and seeing a rich lady wear such commoner clothing creates a large gap, but I don’t even feel the energy to get excited over that. What even happened? Last I remember, I accepted a sports drink from Konoe beneath the scorching sun, and...

“I’m sorry, I didn’t want to use such fierce methods.”

“So you were the one who planned all of that!”

“It’s fine, the medicine wasn’t that strong.”

“That’s the problem!?”

“It worked about as well as that certain detective’s arm clock

tranquilizer gun¹.”

“It worked perfectly, yeah!”

“There is always only one truth.”

“Shut up! This ain’t the time to act cool with his catchphrase!”

“However, you are a bit off with something, Jirou-kun.”

“Huh?”

“It didn’t exactly work perfectly.” Suzutsuki pointed at the clock inside the room.

...Wait a second, that’s weird. The arms of the clock are pointing towards 7 in the morning...Don’t tell me!

“It actually worked a bit too perfectly, see.”

“Yooooooooooooooooooooo!?”

“I was worried, you know? You wouldn’t wake up at all.”

“Now I should actually call for a private detective!”

“There is always only one truth.”

“You’re the criminal!”

“I didn’t have any bad intentions, okay. Also, you must have been lacking some sleep as well, right? A few days ago, you pulled an all-nighter, right?”

“Urk...”

Just as she said, that day I spent with Kurose playing games all night. Maybe that’s why the medicine worked so well. But, why does she even...No, better not think about it too deeply. What’s more important right now...

“So, what exactly is going on, dear Suzutsuki-san?”

“Fufu, I’m glad you’re quick to switch. You’re quite positive I see, Jirou-kun.” The young lady smiled as her black twintails swayed in a breeze.

Don’t underestimate me. I always try to keep positive thinking ongoing during my day. If not, then I wouldn’t have survived in that hellish family.

“But, don’t you understand after looking around?”

“I mean, this seems to be some inn or whatever, but beyond that...”

You’re wearing a yukata. Looking around, this room looks like a large Japanese place, filled with the scent of tatami mats. From the open window, a faint salty sea breeze entered the room, and—Wait, hold on. Sea breeze? Don’t tell me...

“You finally realized? This is a certain hot spring inn near the sea.”

“H-Hot spring inn?”

“By the way, this inn is connected to my family. Not to mention that we’ve rented the entire place. What do you think? Shocking, right?”

“...Rather than shocking...”

Why even this place? Near the sea...a hot spring inn...That’s almost like we’re on a trip. Oh yeah, Konoe mentioned something like that... Something about ‘Let’s run away together’.

“There is a proper reason for this.” Suzutsuki started explaining. “I ran away from home.”

“Huuuh!?”

“I ran away from home. I got in a fight with my parents.”

“A fight...”

“They said that we should go on a trip overseas during this summer break. They ignored my opinion, so I boycotted. Of course, together with Subaru.”

“...Huh, really now.”

Wait, this isn't the time to simply accept that. Since she ran away from home...that's pretty much the same as Konoe during Golden Week. I don't know the concrete details, but maybe they're just in their rebellious phase. Even so—something feels off. I mean, she's still taking a trip right now. Did she hate the idea of going overseas that much? Why is a hot spring inn so much better...

“I mean, you'd hate it if people just decided things for you, right? This is my precious once in a lifetime summer break, so I want to enjoy it the way I prefer.”

“No no no no, didn't you literally decide my plans right now?”

“I was worried to only have girls with me on this trip.”

“Even so...Konoe's plenty, right?”

As a butler, she's trained in self-defence, and is pretty strong. She could even win against Kureha, and since Kureha bested an Asian black bear before, I doubt any average person could stand their ground against Konoe.

“Well, the biggest reason is...a training camp.”

“Training camp?”

“That's right, a training camp solely focussed on fixing your gynophobia. Don't worry, I properly came up with a plan, so we'll deal with it during this summer.” The rich lady flashed a gentle smile.

She's clearly out to just play around with me, right. If I had to guess, she pulled me along because she saw another chance to tease me again. Am I some board game you can just take with you anywhere?

“Before coming here, we stopped by your house, and had Kureha-chan prepare a change of clothes for you, so don't worry.”

“Huh, aren't you considerate. Well, going on a trip once in a while won't hurt, I guess.”

You might think that I'm taking this a bit too well despite it being so abrupt, but I just learned that complaining about the same stuff over and over won't get you anywhere. It must be something I learned thanks to my family's environment. Since I'm on a trip already, I might as well. Not to mention that it's a luxurious hot spring inn near the sea, I won't get many more chances to visit these kinds of places.

"Alright, I'll tag along with you. Also, I wanna change my clothes, so could you take me to my room?"

If what she's saying is true, then I've been wearing the same clothes ever since yesterday, so I want to quickly change into something fresh...However.

"What are you talking about?" Suzutsuki opened her mouth like she was saying something obvious. "This is our room."

"...Wha?"

Timeout, timeout, eh? What, so that means...

"Fufufu."

I froze up because of the shock, to which Suzutsuki's cheeks turned a faint red.

"Jirou-kun, you got more than you show."

"!"

"You ended up being quite well-trained. Have you been training on the side recently?"

"W-Wait a second, Suzutsuki. Why do you know such personal information about me?"

"Eh? Do I really need to say that?" Suzutsuki put her index finger on her own lips with a teasing smile, and. "Ahahaha."

"Don't cover it up with a laugh! W-What were you doing while I was asleep!? And without my consent even!"

“Your mouth can say whatever you want, but your body is quite honest.”

“Seriously?!”

“You can let out quite the adorable voice, Jirou-kun.”

“Nooooooooo!?”

“Fufu, just kidding. You don’t need to take everything so seriously.”

“.....”

“Well, the fact of us sharing this room is the truth though.”

“I really wish that part was you just kidding as well!”

Ahhhhh this devil! Normally I’d be above the clouds in excitement to sleep in the same room as a girl, but we’re talking about Suzutsuki Kanade. She will definitely pull off some sick joke when I’m asleep. Like stripping me naked.

“Also, why are we sleeping in the same room?”

“There’s also a proper reason for that. We wouldn’t have been able to reserve this inn otherwise.”

Suddenly, Suzutsuki closed the distance between us, coming close enough that I could feel her breath.

“Would you like to know?”

“W-What exactly?”

“The reason we needed to stay in the same room. It’s related to the title of this inn.”

“Title?”

“Running away. Elopement. You heard from Subaru, right? We came here to run away as lovers.”



With a sweet voice like a kitten begging for food, she whispered into my ear.

...This is bad. What kind of situation is this? This is a hot spring inn, a secluded room, with just the two of us, she's wearing a yukata, on top of a futon...Waaah, such a death match! Not to mention that, because of Suzutsuki's position, I could see a bit deeper inside her yukata...with...you know, her cleavage and stuff...?

“Hey, Jirou-kun.” Smiling Deretsuki-san approached me.

Waaaah, I can almost touch her! Is this another part of her gynophobia treatment program? If so, then that would be far too forceful. What if that crossdressing butler saw us right here? I won’t make it out of here alive, and...Wait? Where is Konoe anyway?

“Young lady, the breakfast has been prepared.” An alto voice passed through the Japanese room.

Looking over, Subaru-sama was wearing a yukata as well, and stood next to the door.

“Thank you, Subaru. Then, let’s go, shall we. We have plans to head to the sea today, and tomorrow, there will be a summer festival. With all these events going on, we need to properly eat and regain energy.” Suzutsuki said, and moved away from me.

“O-Okay.” I muttered, and stood up.

It seems like Konoe didn’t think much when witnessing that just now. Well, that makes sense. I’m the weird guy who got all self-conscious in that situation after all.

“...Jirou.”

Right after I was about to leave the room, Konoe called out to me in a voice only I could pick up.

“R-Right now...w-w-w-were you about to kiss the young lady...?”

“.....”

Calm down, calm down. She’s got the wrong idea, so clear it up.

“W-While I’m gone, you two...on a futon even...”

“C-Calm down, that’s no way that would happen, okay.”

“B-But, your faces were so close, and...”

“That was just Suzutsuki teasing me again, alright.”

That had to have been it. After all, she confessed to me at the school festival just as a joke.

“Also, there’s no way we’d just kiss like that, right?”

Or so I say, but Suzutsuki and I kissed already. I really want to forget about it. It was probably just another prank of hers.

“...R-Right.” Konoe listened to my words, and started blushing like she was embarrassed about something.

...Hm? What’s that reaction for? O-Oh right, Konoe and I also kissed before...huh. However, that was an accident and nothing more. Konoe had to do that in order to save me from drowning, but ever since that was revealed, Konoe would start blushing like a ripe tomato as soon as that story comes up. Seems to be memories she can’t forget even if she wanted to.

I might be relatively calm while analyzing this, but since these are memories I never even experienced, and it was necessary to save my life, I can’t tell if it’s a blessing in disguise or not. However, that wasn’t the case for Konoe, understandably...

“Come on, let’s go eat breakfast ourselves.” I said, in an attempt to fix this awkward atmosphere.

“...Yeah.” After a brief silence, Konoe joined in, and followed after me.

Well, once we’re done eating lunch, things will be better, surely. The two of us stepped out into the hallway, and followed Suzutsuki. Hmmm, this sure is a flashy inn, alright. It’s crazy enough they might recommend it in a travel guide book. Being able to rent this entire thing...is no joke.

I glanced at the pamphlet they offered in the hallway, and as expected, this is pretty far away from our place...Wait? Isn’t this near the inn Kureha and the others went to? Then again, they went to a deserted island, so running into them is very unlikely.

“...Hm?”

Something caught my attention. Why is the pretense of this trip ‘Elopement’? And why was that necessary in order to rent this inn?

“Hey, Konoe, what is the goal of this trip?” I asked the butler walking next to me, only to get back a baffled ‘Eh?’.

“The goal...you didn’t hear from the young lady?”

“Only that us being on elopement or something was necessary in order to rent this inn, but that’s about it. Also, is the reason for this trip really just Suzutsuki’s selfishness?”

“...Hm.” For some reason, Konoe averted her gaze.

Excuse me, but what kind of reaction is that? Is it that hard to say? We both just ended up silent, and walked along the hallway next to each other.

“Oh my, good morning.” A woman wearing Japanese clothing appeared.

She might be the proprietress of this inn. Age-wise, it would fit.

“You must be...Sakamachi-sama, I take it. Nice to meet you, I am the proprietress of this inn, Yugawara.” The woman introducing herself as such lowered her head.

Since this was mere politeness, I did the same. Since this inn is connected to the Suzutsuki Family, they probably know each other?

“Thank you very much for choosing this inn.”

“No, I’m just tagging along, nothing more.”

Hmm, talking to her is a bit nerve wracking. Maybe it’s because I’m not used to it. Still, she sure is polite. I was practically just dragged along here, so there’s no need to be this considerate.

“By the way, Sakamachi-sama.” Yugawara-san suddenly moved closer to me, whispering. “Naturally, tonight’s bath will be mixed bathing, I assume?”

“.....”

Now hold your damn horses. What did she just say?

“Rest assured. Normally we would not offer such special service, but we know that Kanade-ojousama and Sakamachi-sama are staying over, so we are willing to provide a bit extra.”

Because of this sudden impact hitting my body, I froze up. Yugawara-san however didn't mind that, and continued. The hell is wrong with her? Why is she trying to be considerate now? Do you have some shut-in son you're caring for? This is weird. Something doesn't make sense here. This is almost like Suzutsuki and I really ran away in an elopement...

“Still, we were quite shocked to hear the news from Kanade-ojousama.” The proprietress Yugawara-san let out a fulfilled ‘Ohohoho’ laugh, like she was a housewife talking about some celebrity scandal. “To think that Kanade-ojousama would be this bold.”

“...Excuse me?”

“Isn't that right, Sakamachi Kinjirou-sama? Or should I already get used to calling you Suzutsuki Kinjirou-sama? It must be hard having sworn your hands in marriage to each other, but being forced to elope as you aren't being accepted by the people around you. However, rest assured. We are your allies here, and will support you no matter what.”

♀ × ♂

“That was the only option I had in order for them to let us stay here, okay.”

Right after we finished eating breakfast. Naturally, I didn't wait another minute to squeeze out the meaning behind the proprietress' words. Of course, we weren't standing in the inn from before, but instead outside, where the salty sea breeze hit us. We were currently moving towards a swimming area close to the coast. The one carrying all the luggage was me, of course. From sheets to beach umbrellas, I

was carrying quite a bit.

“If I said that I was just running away from home, they might have contacted the main family, and had them take me back, don’t you agree?”

“That doesn’t mean you can just make up nonsense about us having promised to marry each other...”

“Isn’t it fine? Thanks to that, we don’t have to pay for the inn.”

“You’re not wrong, but...”

To think she just announced us as fiancées. Makes sense why we’d stay in the same room. Rather than elopement, this is like a honeymoon.

“Also, if we didn’t do that, then something troublesome would have happened, right, Subaru?”

“Y-Young lady...!” Because of Suzutsuki’s words, Konoe started panicking.

“After all, the people working at that inn don’t know that Subaru is a girl. Only the people living in the Suzutsuki Residence know of that fact.”

“So why is that so problematic?”

“Splitting up the rooms, you know. Normally they would put the two men in a group, and the woman in a room of her own.”

“Ahh, I see.”

Separating men and women, I see. Basically, it would have ended with me and Konoe in the same room. I could see Konoe panicking in embarrassment. That’s how we all three ended up in the same room, huh.

“Two fiancées, and their servant, all three of them on the run in elopement. It’s a bit forceful, but now it won’t be suspicious that we all stay in the same room.”

“It feels like we’re on a school trip.”

Then again, a single guy in a room with two girls is still pretty dangerous. Especially for my sleeping schedule. And no, I’m not thinking about anything weird.

“Apologies, Jirou. It’s not that I hated the idea of sleeping in the same room as you, it’s just...”

“I know, don’t worry about it.”

Konoe might be dressing as a guy, but deep down she still is a girl. It’d be awkward to sleep in the same room as a boy.

“...Oh?”

As we walked along the path next to the sea, a strong marine blue and white beach entered our view. It’s an everlasting summer beach. We’ve made it to our own summer paradise.

“Waaah, amazing!” I was overwhelmed by the scenery in front of me, and let out a dumbfounded comment.

The sparkling sea, the comfortable breeze, the sound of the waves, and the cheerful voices of the other tourists, this was better than I expected. Maybe I should be a bit more thankful that they brought me here.

“Now, let’s have some fun.” It must have been subconsciously done, but even the rich lady’s voice had a bit of excitement in her.

I split up with the two at a nearby changing room with coin lockers, changed into my swimsuit, and walked towards the beach all on my own. Wahoooooooo—is what I was feeling right now. In April we already headed to the leisure land, but the real deal is the best after all. The shining sun, the clear blue sky, the waves crashing, everything is just so authentic, and stimulating. Who could not get excited with this. Alright, better set up the sheet and parasol...

“At least wait for us to change, will you?”

Right as I was entranced by the paradise in front of me, I heard an

annoyed voice behind my back. I reflexively turned around—and swallowed my breath. There stood Suzutsuki Kanade, naturally wearing a swimsuit.

“The sea really is great.” The rich lady narrowed her eyes, as she gazed at the open sea.

It’s the same black bikini she wore at the leisure land before. Her proportions really are no joke. It feels like we’re gathering the attention of the people around us a lot more now, so I guess it must be because of Suzutsuki, I bet. Even her gestures made her look like a model currently on a photoshoot.

“P-Please wait, young lady!”

Running after Suzutsuki was the all-too-familiar Butler-kun with her hair down, slightly reddened cheeks, and...Wait? Why is she wearing a bath towel around her body?

“Hm?”

There, I caught on to something crucial. Back at the leisure land, she was changing in the same room as me. Of course, that is because we had Kureha with us, who did not know of her secret. However, Kureha was not around right now. That would mean...possibly...

“Come on, don’t be so embarrassed.” Suzutsuki forcefully pulled the towel off Konoe’s body.

“Hya!” Konoe let out a shriek as her body was revealed.

Unlike the clothes she wore back at the leisure land, these were clearly aimed at women—a bikini. It was a snow white bikini unbefitting of this summer season, and although it didn’t emphasize her chest like Suzutsuki’s, the frilly pareo skirt looked great on her. More than anything, this might be the first time I see Konoe looking so feminine, compared to her usual male attire.

Her white skin, her delicate hands and legs, her revealed collarbone, and even her faintly red cheeks, it’s like I was looking at an entirely different person...

“J-Jirou...how is it? Young lady chose this swimsuit for me.”

“.....!” Out of embarrassment, I averted my gaze.

I bet that my face wasn't feeling hot solely because of the sunlight hitting me.

“Y-Yeah, not bad.” I somehow managed to move my lips, and formed these words.

I sure as hell could think of much better words to compliment her with, but that is the best I could manage.

“T-Thanks...!” Subaru-sama seemed relieved, as she gently smiled.

...Damn it, she's so cute. I couldn't even look at her, so I averted my gaze towards the shore. Because we were in the middle of summer break season, the beach was full with tourists. In the midst of these I saw a group doing the melon-splitting game, some guys trying to pick up girls with especially big breasts, and children who were creating a large crater in the sand.

By the way, I actually have no experience when it comes to melon-splitting. At home, they split the melon with a piledriver move, and I was more specialized in actually eating them. Still, what a large watermelon that is. Maybe they would share some with me?

“...Hmpf.”

I heard a displeased voice near me. Looking over, Konoe was closely inspecting my face as I had been looking at the melon-splitting event.

“What's wrong? What's that scary face for?”

I mean, rather than a scary face, she looked more like a sulking child, making her look cute than anything. Why is she in such a bad mood now? I was just watching some big-breasted girls doing some big melon-splitting.

“W-Well...” Konoe put her fingers together in front of her chest. “So...I guess...you like bigger ones as well, Jirou?”

“...Bigger ones?”

I mean, the bigger watermelon the better, but why are we talking about that now?

“I mean yeah, I like big ones.”

“Wha...”

When I gave a straight response, Konoe seemingly received a huge shock, as she embraced her chest with both her arms.

“~~~!”

...? Does she like smaller ones instead?

“D-Do you like big ones that much?”

“I mean, they’re more delicious, right?”

“D-Delicious...”

“Easier to bite into as well.”

“Bite into!?”

“...Why are you shocked about that?”

I’m just talking about my preference for watermelons.

“I-I had no idea that you would be so bold as to proudly declare that.”

“Boldly declare...I mean, isn’t that pretty normal?”

“Normal...”

“Even Kureha said ‘I like bigger ones!’, you know?”

“Why would Kureha-chan say such a thing!?” Konoe staggered backwards.

What’s so weird about that? We would often eat watermelons at

home. Our relatives grow watermelons themselves, so they would send us a large amount of them every year. Watermelons basically remind me of the summer season.

“I-I had no idea that Kureha-chan had such interests...!”

“Interests? Isn’t that normal in an average family? Are you different?”

“Of course! I’m not like you!”

“Our family all loves them, though.”

“They all love them!?”

“I think I came to like them when I was like 4.”

“At an age when you were still carrying a kindergarten backpack!?”

“Even our relatives would often bring them over.”

“Why!?”

“Huh? To share them, of course.”

“S-Share them?”

“They said ‘We’ve taken great care of them, so please enjoy’.”

“Waaaaaaaah!?” Konoe held her head as she crouched down in despair.

“Scary...Commoner families are scary...!” She muttered, like she had received a severe culture shock.

What is wrong with her? Maybe she’s suffering from a heatstroke? I was planning on explaining the greatness of watermelons to her now.

“...That is some crazy acrobatic conversation you two are having right now.” Suzutsuki let out a sigh, like she understood everything.

Acrobatic? We were just talking about watermelons though?

“Don’t worry, I’ll properly explain everything to Subaru later so that

she won't live on with this misunderstanding." The rich lady explained with a serious expression.

Next to her was our dear Butler-kun, growing pale as she muttered 'No way, Kureha-chan is...' or something like that...Well, whatever. We're all just excited to stand here in front of the sea.

"Now then, let's go for a swim, shall we. But, before that...Take care of this, will you." Suzutsuki handed me some sunscreen cream.

...Hey. Are you telling me to...

"This marks the beginning of the long-awaited treatment program. Won't you put this on me?"

With a calm and rational tone of voice as always, Suzutsuki laid down on the sheet beneath the parasol, and...Gyaaaaaaah! Why is she pulling off the string of her bikini top!?

"Y-You!"

"What's wrong? I feel like this should be a pretty effective treatment method. And, you protect me from the sun, so it's two birds with one stone, right."

You're definitely not wrong, alright. My gaze was drawn towards Suzutsuki's open back. Soft skin, with a faint sweat building on it, showing not a single pore of impurity, not to mention her behind still covered by the swimsuit, she's far too defenceless.

"...!"

...This is bad. All of the blood inside my body is going to start boiling.

"T-Then, here I go?" I sat down next to Suzutsuki, and put some sunscreen on my hand.

This is all treatment, so I can only put up with it...!

"Ah, a small reminder, Jirou-kun. If you were to end up with a nosebleed here, you'll be mistaken as someone suspicious, and

probably taken away for life.”

“I-I know that!”

Calm down, me. Be like a machine. All I have to do is put sunscreen on a girl’s back, that’s my job. I want to become a machine. Slowly, my palm reached towards Suzutsuki’s back—

“Hya!”

“Wah!? W-What! Don’t let out a weird voice like that!”

“I mean, it was cold, so...”

“That doesn’t mean you should just let out a voice you normally wouldn’t!”

“How rude. What kind of character am I in your eyes?”

“You sure as hell know that yourself, don’t you!”

“Fufu, I wonder. Ah, do my nape as well, please.”

“Yeah yeah...Urk!?”

“...Are you okay?”

“S-Shut up. I’m trying hard not to get a nosebleed right now.”

“Hmm, are you that excited?”

“M-Moron! As if I’d get gyaaaah!?”

Something cold touched my back, forcing me to let out a shriek. Turning around, sitting there was Konoe Subaru. She was putting sunscreen on my back now.

“Jirou, let me help you with the sunscreen.”

“P-Please, no more...!”

“Also, one question...” Konoe smiled. “—Watermelon-splitting or playing in the sand.”

“Eh?”

“I mean, I was just wondering which you preferred?”

“.....”

Crap, her eyes look dead. If I had to guess, she’s probably deciding between splitting my head, or burying me in the sand. She probably thinks I’m laying my hands on her master, right.

“Highya!?”

Despite it being mid-summer, I felt goosebumps all over my body. As expected, you could say. I’m touching Suzutsuki’s bareback, while Konoe is touching my back. Damn it, this undoubtedly can be seen as treatment. It’s like I’m hanging on for life with a single thread, like a doll almost. There’s no knowing when I’m done for.

“Hey, Jirou-kun. Just putting it on normally is boring, so how about we make this a game?” Not knowing of my suffering, Suzutsuki spoke up. “You’ll be writing something on my back, and I have to guess that.”

“G-Got it. You want me to focus on something else during this situation so that my symptoms don’t activate, right?”

“Correct. Go ahead and write something.”

“A-Alright...”

Then again, what should I write? Maybe some random word? For now, I put my index finger on her back.

“...Ahhnn!”

“!? What was that voice just now?”

“I-I’m fine...Your finger just tickled my back, that’s all.”

“R-Really? Then, I’m writing it.”

“Ah...no...s-slower...”

“O-Okay...”

“Hya, no...so fast...and so strong...”

“.....”

“Ah...Ah...Ahnn...No...it’s just your finger, and yet...”

“Suzutsuki, you’re doing this on purpose, right?”

“Fufu, you found out already? I figured you’d be happy about this.”
She laughed it off.

I figured, she really is in her Deretsuki mode. But, don’t underestimate me. It made my heart race faster, but you haven’t stolen my heart yet.

“...A-Alright.” I somehow managed to finish writing what I wanted onto Suzutsuki’s back.

Everybody knows it, so I don’t think it’s that difficult...

“Eh? You want me to say such obscene words?”

“I knew you’d be twisting the game around like that!”

“But, telling me to say ‘Noo, Jirou-kun, not so fiercely’ is...”

“I didn’t even write anything remotely close to that! Also, Konoe, why are you hammering ‘Kill’ onto my back like that?!”

“...Hmpf.”

“Eek! Stop, don’t wrap your fingers around my neck—!”

On a side note, the words I wrote on Suzutsuki’s back were ‘Omae wa mou shindeiru’. I always wanted to say these words as a man. This might just be unneeded information, but around ten months after Kureha was born, these were her first words apparently. Not bad, I must say.

“Oh? Are you done already?” Suzutsuki sounded oddly dissatisfied.

Like hell I'd continue this for much longer. I'm already running short on breath. It feels like I'm the winner of a tough russian roulette game.

"Urk..."

I feel sick. All this time I was desperately clinging on to my consciousness, so I'm feeling dizzy. It's almost like I was riding a rollercoaster for hours.

"Fufu, thank you. How about you buy some drinks before we go for a swim, you're a bit pale in the face."

"...Yeah, I'll do that." I stood up on unsteady feet, and headed to the beach house where we store our belongings.

I would have preferred to go for a swim right away, but if I entered the sea now, I would most likely drown. Even though it was barely noon, the front of the stalls were crowded. I was wondering why that was the case, since this mass of people was weird even for the season, but the irregularity was the service. Listening to the words of the other customers around, apparently there's girls in swimsuits servicing you. What a great idea that is. As long as it doesn't violate any rules around here.

"Woah!?"

I lined up behind the crowd of people, when someone bumped into me, making me drop my glasses in the process. Ahh, my glasses are covered in sand now...Better wash it soon...

"Welcome!"

With this, my turn arrived. Hm, can't help it. I'll just put the glasses in my swimsuit's pocket for now. I'll have to order without them for now.

"...!"

However, when I stood facing the employee, I was at a loss for words. A monster greeted me. Wrapped in an orange bikini were voluptuous breasts. Damn, she might have more than Suzutsuki actually.

“...? Is something wrong?” The girl tilted her head in front of me.

She possessed long, brightly-colored hair. Adding her calm gaze with glasses, her tanned look gave her a more relaxing vibe...But, what's that on her head?

“...Cat ears?” I muttered.

That's right, those were undoubtedly cat ears. For some reason, the glasses girl wore cat ears at the beach. Hmm, maybe this is some booming fashion trend? Well, just staring at her would be rude, I guess.

“Hm? You...” The girl closely inspected my face. “You would look great with glasses, yes.”

“.....”

I feel like she said something far more rude right there. What even is that supposed to mean? Oh yeah, a girl I recently got to know was saying similar stuff. I wonder what she's doing right now? Since she's part of the handicrafts club, she's probably trying to survive on a deserted island right now.

“However, you probably won't be able to win against that person.”

“That person?”

“Yes, he's a Senpai at our school, known as the King of Glasses.”

“Can you say that in front of the person in question? I bet he really dislikes that name.”

“Well, we never called him like that, but I'm sure Sakamachi-senpai wouldn't mind.”

“.....”

Man, the world really is a small place. To think there existed another glasses bastard with the same family name as me.

“But, he's not just all glasses.”

“Hmm.”

“After all, that Senpai is actually in love with our school’s prince.”

“Wait a second...”

“A storm of BL, yes. Tres bien, indeed. A modern Romeo and Juliet.”

“Don’t think Romeo and Juliet were both men, you know...”

“Ahh, if only he was here with us...He would surely create more great material, including both BL and glasses, and...Ouchies!?”

Reflexively, I flicked my fingers on the glasses’ lens. In response, the girl rolled around on the floor, screaming ‘My eyes, my eyes!’...Crap, this exchange feels oddly nostalgic. To be accurate, something similar happened at the school festival. Back then, I couldn’t see what she looked like because of the costume, but this glasses junkie attitude, and this voice...No, calm down. She should be off on a deserted island.

“Ouch, how cruel...” The girl fixed her glasses, and groaned.

“Ah, sorry, was that too strong?”

“...No need for you to apologize. Instead...” For some reason the girl was gasping for air, and took out stylish glasses from somewhere.

“Put on some glasses as well.”

“Why!?”

“Eh? Well, you need to take responsibility for what you did.”

“What a weird way for me to take responsibility!”

“Then, your order won’t cost anything as long as you put them on... Ahh, why are you trying to run!”

“Well, my stomach suddenly started hurting...”

“That’ll be fixed once you put on these glasses!”

“Like hell it will!”

“It’s true! Every kind of sickness can be healed with glasses alone! They can even help with severe diseases, and make you all energetic and healthy again, so come here!”

“That sounds like it could come out of a late night shopping channel! Get away from me!”

“You won’t get away! Not until you put on these glasses!” A devil’s hand grabbed for me beyond the counter.

Eek, I came here to relax, so why is my gynophobia activating again! Not to mention that with every move, the girl’s breasts are just shaking all over the place! Damn it, I need to get away quickly, or else...

“Nakuru? What are you doing?” A sharp and resentful voice rang out.

Immediately after, the glasses fanatic was blown off with a squeaky ‘Ahn!’ voice. It seems like she got kicked by that previous voice.

“Seriously, we’re busy enough already, so do your work alr—” Mid-sentence, the girl in her purple swimsuit blinked in confusion, as she looked at me.

These twintails hanging down her side, there’s no mistaking it...

“...Stupid chicken. What are you doing here?”

“...That’s my phrase.”

That’s right, this is Usami Masamune, who just kicked away the glasses junkie Nakuru, now giving me a dumbfounded gaze.

♀ × ♂

“Nya? Nii-san? Why are you here?”

“...Yo, Kureha.”

We were inside the beach house. Sitting around the table were

Masamune, Nakuru, and me, as Kureha called out to me with a ‘Nyaha, that looks fun’. She wore the same red bikini she had worn at the leisure land a while back, still fitting her body physique, which would surely please a small group of people in this world. Though, that fact is probably a massive complex for the person in question, and I’d probably get killed if I mentioned that.

When I asked why the handicrafts club was here and not on that deserted island as originally planned, they told me that...apparently they failed to sneak onto that carriage ship. According to what Masamune told me, they moved with the truck, but these three were the only guys who got caught, and barely managed to escape before getting arrested. They’re as crazy as always. Soon enough, they’ll get casted as actors.

“The club president took care of our luggage, so we had to contact them via satellite transmission, but it seems like they safely managed to infiltrate the destination. Though, they can’t come to pick us up.”

“So that’s why you’re working part-time here to earn money?”

“It’s so that we can get home. I said I was fine trying it again, but both Usamin-senpai and NaruNaru said ‘No more smuggling’.”

“Well duh.”

Looking over, Masamune and Nakuru were quivering in fear, with pale expressions, as they probably remembered the incident. I bet it must have turned into a trauma. By the way, the reason Nakuru couldn’t figure out it was me was simply because ‘You weren’t wearing your glasses’. As a result of that, the second I washed my glasses and put them on, she immediately realized.

“Hey, stupid chicken. Please, treat us to something. We’re starving.”

“...I don’t mind, but you better pay me back later, alright?”

Going along with Masamune’s request, I ordered 3x yakisoba. Apparently their contract said that they couldn’t eat anything until their shift was over. What a hard working condition this is.

“By the way, Nii-san.” There, my little sister spoke up. “Why are you

here? Weren't you supposed to be travelling with Onee-sama and Subaru-sama?"

"!"

...Crap. Kureha knew about me going on that trip. Ahhh, how can I explain things. Saying it how things are is a bit too complicated. After all, Suzutsuki and I are supposed to be fiancées right now.

"...Onee-sama? Did you have an older sister?" Masamune asked with a dubious expression.

"Eh? No, Usamin-senpai, Onee-sama refers to Nii-san's classmate Suzutsuki-senpai."

"...What?" There, Masamune's face froze up.

Then, she turned her gaze towards me, stiff like a robot.

"What is this about? Why are you on a trip with a girl in your class? Not to mention...that very Suzutsuki Kanade?"

"Well, that's..."

The second Suzutsuki's name popped up, Masamune's mood clearly took a dip. Maybe they really are on bad terms? Either way, this is bad. I need to come up with a way to get out of this situation soon, or else...

"Hm?"

As I was thinking that, the phone in my pocket vibrated. Worst of all, it was from Konoe Subaru. She must be worried because I was taking my time coming back.

"Ah, seems to be a call from Subaru-sama, I see."

"!?"

Nakuru frivolously took a peek at my phone screen, to which the gazes of the girls pierced me. I immediately sought to escape this pressure, and accepted the call.

‘Hello, Jirou?’

“Y-Yo, Konoe. What’s up.”

‘You ask me that...What happened? You’re taking pretty long just to buy some drinks.’

“W-Well, something happened, see~”

‘Hm? Whatever, we’re on our way now.’

“Why!?”

‘Why do you ask that...It’s time to eat lunch now.’

“D-Don’t come here! It’s a trap!”

‘What are you on about!?’

“A-Anyway, don’t you dare come here!”

‘Even if you suddenly say that...it’s too late.’

“Too late?”

‘I mean, we’re already at the place.’

“Waaaaaaaaah!”

Konoe must have been surprised at my shout, as the call was cut...Oh lord, this is bad. Right now, Konoe is looking like a girl. Even with these girls, they’ll realize what’s going on...namely that Subaru-sama is actually a girl...!

“Huh? Isn’t that Onee-sama over there?”

Urk...

“Ah, you’re right. They’re in front of the store.”

Eek!

“But, who’s that with her? I can’t really see them from here—”

“I-I’ll go bring them here!” I screamed, and dashed outside, aiming directly for Konoe Subaru.

I definitely cannot let them run into her here. I can only come up with a way to hide it...!

“What’s wrong, Jirou? Why are you panicking like that?”

Luckily, both Konoe and Suzutski hadn’t fully entered yet. Their bodies were still a bit wet from swimming just now. This is a chance. I can still make it. With these thoughts, I reached for **that**. If I can just make her wear that...!

“...Konoe, listen to me.” I didn’t waste much time explaining. “Please wear these immediately.”

“These...you mean these glasses?” Konoe looked at the thin-frame glasses in my hand.

These were the glasses Nakuru tried to push on me just now. I happened to pick them up on a whim after Nakuru got kicked by Masamune, so I can use them now. They don’t seem to be too strong, so it should be fine. Basically, I want to use this as a disguise. You might think it’s way too easy to see through, but the only way I can see things working out here is to act like she’s a different person. If someone has a different idea, put that on an online forum or DM it to me.

“Please! This is for your sake!”

“I don’t mind, but...are you into this sort of thing, Jirou?”

“Why are you suddenly blushing like that!?”

“B-Because...” Subaru-sama was at a loss of a reaction.

Ahh, just hurry up already. We can’t waste any more time like this...

“Nii-san? What are you doing?”

Eeeeek! When I looked behind me, there stood Kureha. It seems like she came running after me.

“Jeez, why are you suddenly running away like that...Wait, eh?”

Right there, Kureha froze up like she was buried in concrete, her eyes wide open. Naturally, she was looking directly at—

“K-Konoe-senpai? W-Why are you looking like that?”

“Ah...T-This is...”

Because of Kureha’s sudden appearance, Konoe ended up pale in an instant. However, those glasses shone on her face, so the disguise is complete...Well, if you can call glasses a disguise. Now it only depends on Konoe, if only she can properly explain herself...

“Y-Y-Y-You’re wrong there is a proper reason for this that you probably don’t understand and...”

...It’s over. These words filled my head. She can’t even properly talk, just rambling on and on. Konoe alone can’t make her way out of this. Please, can’t someone else guess what I’m playing at...A kind individual who would never use me for her own pleasure...

“What are you talking about, Kureha-chan?” There, a dignified voice spoke up.

Looking over, Suzutsuki had called out to Kureha.

“That’s not Subaru.”

“Eh? B-But, she looks exactly like Subaru-sama just with his hair down and glasses on...”

“Indeed. However, she is his cousin, and lives around here. Have you forgotten that Subaru is a boy? There’s no way this could be him.”

“T-That might be true, but then...what about Konoe-senpai?”

“He’s currently meeting her relatives living here. Instead of him, this girl is tagging along. Then again, she’s not my butler or anything.” She explained with a calm voice as usual, lining up lie after lie.

That’s Devil Suzutsuki for you. She grasped the situation in an

instant. And, she executed a follow-up so awfully well, it's giving me chills. She's reaching Las Vegas casino card dealer levels right there. But...thank god. I guess even that teasing rich lady knows when the situation is serious. That's right, she wouldn't use this situation to...

"By the way, her name is—Punyuru."

"...What?"

Konoe, Kureha, and me all let out a dumbfounded voice.

"That's this girl's name. Takanashi Punyuru. Takanashi is her mother's name. It's modern and cute, right?" Suzutsuki smiled gently.

Look how much fun she's having right now! Why'd you give her such a weird name like 'Punyuru'? That's just taking it too far. You won't find anybody with such an eccentric name. There's no way Kureha will believe you...

"Huh, Punyuru-san, is it. What a cute name!"

She actually believed it!? My little sister is too much of an idiot! Or so I'd like to retort, but I can't blame her. She admired Suzutsuki as her 'Onee-sama' after all. Recently, she believes more in what Suzutsuki says than my own words. That's why this result might be expected. At the very least, we made it past the first hurdle. All that's left is to take care of Masamune and Nakuru...

"...Ah, Kureha-chan."

There, Suzutsuki let out a snicker, like she just came up with something exciting. You're kidding, right? She's still not done?

"I forgot to tell you, but you don't need to add the 'san' to her name."

"Eh? Does that mean..."

"That's right, she's a fellow first-year student like you. By the way, we're very close, so she calls me 'Kana-oneechan', you know."

"...!?" Konoe's body twitched in shock.

“What’s wrong, Punyuru. Since you’re not my butler, you don’t need to call me ‘Young lady’, nor would it be natural for you to use polite speech, right?”

“~~~!”

“Just call me as you usually would. Come on, say ‘Kana-oneechan’.”

“~~~~~!” I could see steam rising from Konoe’s head.

I don’t blame her, this must be a first for her. If I had to guess, Suzutsuki’s goal is to be on equal terms with Konoe, wanting to be treated as her friend. After all, right now they are master and butler. Konoe will always be more considerate of her. Still, she really is using everything she can at her disposal, huh. Then again, she probably just wants to be called ‘Onee-chan’ in a fresh way, I guess.

“Urk...Ka...Ka...” Konoe...No, Takanashi Punyuru started fidgeting, and slowly opened her mouth. “...Kana-oneechan.”

“...!? H-Hey, Suzutsuki!?”

Suddenly, Suzutsuki collapsed like a doll that had its strings cut.

She crouched down on the floor, muttering ‘I-I think I just awakened a dangerous monster...!’, like a scientist who just scientifically created a monster on his operating table. It seems like she almost lost consciousness because of the cuteness. What a terrifying being Takanashi Punyuru is. To think she could corner Suzutsuki Kanade like this...!

“By the way, Punyuru will call Jirou-kun ‘Jirou-oniichan’ as well.”

“!?”

She must have felt frustrated to be the only one who collapsed like that, as she next aimed for me. Please, if Konoe were to say that right now...!

“~~~!” Konoe bit on her lip in embarrassment, and muttered with a voice about to disappear. “...Jirou-oniichan.”

“—!”

Ahh, I get it. I was probably born to hear these words out of her mouth. The normal tongue-tied and indifferent Subaru-sama...just called me Onii-chan. What kind of straight ball to the heart is that. That's a guaranteed strike.

“...Senpai, why are you taking a knee while grinning like that?” A worried voice came from Nakuru as she looked down at me.

Even Masamune was with her, maybe they came looking because they were worried?

“Ah, let me introduce you, NaruNaru. This girl is Konoe-senpai's cousin, Takanashi Punyuru-chan. She's the same year as me it seems.”

“Subaru-sama's cousin? Not to mention those glasses...” Nakuru closed in on Konoe, closely inspecting her glasses.

Ah, I forgot. The glasses Konoe is wearing right now originally belong to her, so maybe she's catching on?

“—Excellent.”

Nope, nevermind. Nakuru just put her hands together like the Holy Mother Maria, and nodded.

“Hello, Punyuru-chan! Nakuru's name is Narumi Nakuru! And, your glasses look great on you!” Being openly excited, Nakuru asked for a handshake with glasses-style Konoe.



She's showing absolutely no doubts towards Kureha's statement. She's an idiot. She's an even bigger moron than Kureha. She's only looking at the glasses in fact.

"But, why is Punyuru-chan wearing Nakuru's spare glasses?"

"A-Ah, when she was swimming just now, they got washed away, so I lent her yours."

“Is that so.” Nakuru nodded.

“She’s got quite the looks, so it was hard finding the right pair for her!” I pointed at Konoe’s glasses, and panicked as I was praising her like a mother would before a marriage.

...Well, whatever. I don’t know what kind of weird brain that glasses junkie has working up there, but at the very least, she seems to believe the existence of Takanashi Punyuru. That’s the second obstacle mastered. All that was left...was the final defence line, known as Usami Masamune. Knowing that nasty rabbit, she’ll probably have a hard battle...

“N-N-N-Nice to meet you, Punyuru-chan.”

To my surprise, Masamune awkwardly greeted Punyuru...Huh? No, that’s not the case. Masamune hates lying to others, and can’t easily put trust into others...And yet, she would so easily believe our words...?

“Hey, stupid chicken.” Masamune quietly whispered into my ear. “Why are you lying like that?”

“!? You realized...!?”

“Of course. Takanashi Punyuru? That’s definitely Subaru-sama wearing glasses. You thought you could deceive me with that?” Masamune declared with confidence.

...How could this happen...To think the day would come where someone figured out Konoe’s secret...Damn it, I should have come up with a better method of hiding it, I’m sorry Konoe...

“But...I’ll play along for now.”

I didn’t expect to hear these words from her.

“Everybody has their own secrets, and I don’t plan on judging other people with their interests. But...this is a shock.”

“Um...what exactly?”

“Huh? I’m talking about Subaru-sama’s crossdressing hobby. He was wearing female clothes back in April at the game center as well, right. Those breasts are mostly pads, I bet. The part where you lied about dating Subaru-sama was to protect that secret, right?”

“.....”

Luckily, Masamune arrived at a misunderstanding herself. Luckily, the swimsuit Konoe wore didn’t emphasize her breasts that much, and with the skirt-type swimsuit, her crotch was hidden as well...I guess. Basically, Masamune thinks that Konoe Subaru is crossdressing as a girl, named Takanashi Punyuru. That’s what I expected, she’s even doubting Suzutsuki.

“But, this is pretty amazing. He totally looks like a girl. Not to mention...so cute...I can’t help but feel nervous when talking to him.”

“Huh? Didn’t you get over Konoe on the day after the school festival?”

“I-I did, but that doesn’t mean I can’t get nervous. He still is the prince of our school, so we’re on a different level. That’s enough for now, right?”

“Enough for now...”

“After all, I have a different problem.” Masamune’s gaze suddenly turned sharp, focusing on—Suzutsuki Kanade.

Even despite that, Suzutsuki kept a calm smile.

“Hello, Usami-san, you’re here as well?”

“Hmpf. Wasn’t planning on it at least. What about you? Why are you on a trip with that stupid chicken?”

“No particular reason? It’s my right to go on a trip with whoever I want, right. Still, to think that you would come to the sea of all places, I always expected more from a scholarship student.”

“I’m not studying all the time, you know. What about you? Think you

can just play around now that you got the top spot on the last end-of-term exams?”

“Fufu, thank you for your kindness. But, rest assured. I can easily get those grades without studying much.”

“Grrr...Y-You...getting on a high horse just because you always win against me...!”

“Eh? Really? I had no idea.”

“~~~! So shameless...!”

Masamune started glaring at Suzutsuki with tears in her eyes, to which the rich lady herself just accepted this with a warm smile. Yeah, it seems like these two really aren’t on the greatest of terms. We have an average citizen and a rich lady, a nasty rabbit and a wolf woman. Their compatibility couldn’t be worse. However, a scholarship student?

“Jirou-oniichan...No, Jirou, I remembered. That Usami is actually the only scholarship student at our school right now.” Konoe must have felt my doubts, as she whispered in my ear.

Still, I’m a bit disappointed she’s calling me like always.

“If you can get the top rank at the entrance exams at our Rouran Academy, and keep that level up down the line as well, you basically get all your student fees paid, right? That’s what it means to be a scholarship student. And, she was at the top of last year’s entrance exam.”

“Oh yeah, I heard something like that.”

Since it didn’t have anything to do with me, I just forgot. Also, Masamune is...? Maybe she’s studying hard so that she doesn’t have to pay for the student fees. Thinking about her saving policy, it wouldn’t surprise me at all.

“But, getting the top spot at the entrance exam is pretty amazing. She even beat you and Suzutsuki, right?”

Suzutsuki and Konoe are both quite the honor students. Every single exam, they're always at the top spot not missing once.

"Well, there was a particular reason for that...We never took the entrance exam."

"You never...what? Why?"

"T.-That's..." Konoe grew silent, signaling that it was hard to say.

Oh yeah, I heard about them using their connections before, since Suzutsuki's the board chairman's daughter, and Konoe her butler.

"But, ever since we started attending this school, that girl has always been losing against the young lady. Even though she's a scholarship student. That's why she sees her as a rival, or so the young lady told me before."

"...Huh."

Well, I feel like that's not the only reason they're on such hostile terms. No clue why, but it feels like Suzutsuki seems to hold a grudge towards Masamune as well. This of course is a rare thing for such an honor student that she was. Either way, as Konoe and I were discussing these things in secret, sparks continued to fly between Masamune and Suzutsuki.

"Tell me, why are you together with that stupid chicken?"

"Are you that interested in Jirou-kun?"

"N-Not at all! Definitely not! I'm just curious why a rich lady like you would travel with some average guy like him!"

"Jirou-kun and I are friends, so isn't that normal?"

"It's not normal at all! That stupid chicken and I are friends as well!"
Like a cornered rabbit, Masamune protested with tears in her eyes.

Hmm...the power relationship is a thing to behold here...Then again, I have yet to meet anybody who can actually stand their ground against that rich lady. Also, why is Masamune so hung up on the fact

that I'm travelling with Suzutsuki?

"...Alright, it can't be helped. I'll tell you the truth." There, Suzutsuki suddenly showed a more serious expression. "He is my fiancée." She blurted out with no hesitation.

"Wha...!?" In response, Masamune froze up. "A-As if I'd just believe that! What are you talking about!"

"It's not a lie. He and I are in the middle of our elopement."

"Elopement!?"

"By the way, we also sleep in the same room at the inn."

"I-In the same room...Don't tell me...!"

"That's right, we slept together last night."

"Wha..."

"Did you know? He actually has quite awful sleeping habits."

"~~~!" Masamune blushed furiously, reaching the level of a ripe apple.

That damn Suzutsuki, she's trying to win with her nonsense again. I didn't expect she'd continue the lie all the way out here. Also, that seemed to work awfully well against Masamune.

"Huh? NaruNaru, you okay?"

When I turned towards Kureha's voice, I found another person who suffered a lethal wound because of Suzutsuki's statement. Namely, Narumi Nakuru, who firmly believed in the BL relationship that I had with Konoe. Surprisingly enough, she stood still with her mouth open, but not moving an inch. She seemed to have passed out while standing, looking like Musashibou Benkei². Still, Kureha is as relaxed as ever, I see. Then again, she was told similar nonsense back in April, so maybe she built up some resistance?

However, the same couldn't be said about Masamune. Maybe I should

provide some follow-up after all? I really don't want people I know to think that I'm engaged to Suzutsuki..

"...That's a lie."

However, Masamune declared so with tears in her eyes.

"A lie? Are you accusing me of lying?"

"Y-Yes, I am."

"Why?"

"I don't know why, but...it's my woman's intuition!" Masamune must have felt pressure from Suzutsuki's words, and teared up even further.

...But even so, Masamune didn't attempt to apologize.

"The fact about you sleeping in the same room might be true, but... being engaged...There's no way you and that stupid chicken are in a relationship like that. There must be another reason for that, right?"

"Now, who knows."

"That won't do, Suzutsuki Kanade. I don't believe you at all. You always had the tendency to make up convenient lies, and although that might work with the people at the school, you won't deceive me with that..." She paused for a moment. "Your nonsense won't work with me." She declared, while glaring at Suzutsuki.

"...Hmm." Suzutsuki calmly muttered. "It seems like I'm not very good at dealing with you, Usami-san."

"Wha...I-I knew it! Everything just now was just your nonsense, right!"

"You were questioning that?"

"O-Of course not! I knew that from the very start!" Masamune puffed out her chest as her twintails shook.

I'm surprised. Usami Masamune saw right through Suzutsuki's nonsensical blabbering. Also, a woman's intuition...What's that? She probably just became even more doubtful than normal. But, that's that nasty rabbit for you. I didn't think she would stand face to face with Suzutsuki.

"But...what will you do with that?"

"...Eh?" Masamune's victorious smile froze up.

"What will you do, finding out? I've been meaning to ask, but where will you be staying for tonight?"

"That's...we haven't decided on that yet..." Masamune's voice grew weaker.

I see, they're basically stranded here. At this rate, they won't even have a place to stay tonight.

"Really? Sounds troublesome. By the way, we are staying at a nearby hot spring inn."

"Urk..."

"Of course, together with Jirou-kun."

"Uuuuu..."

"If you're okay with it, why don't you join us? Though I have to say, the inn we stay at is quite luxurious, so the price is something I need to mention."

"U-Urk...Y-Yeah, sleeping out is something I want to avoid, but..."

"Rest assured, I'm not some devil. As a fellow girl, I wouldn't want you to camp outside, so if you were to listen to my request, I wouldn't mind letting you stay over...How about that?"

"A request...what exactly?"

"On your knees."

“Huuh!?”

“Of course, bare naked while only wearing kneesocks.”

“What kind of lewd roleplay is that?!”

“Just kidding. Don’t take it too seriously, will you.”

“Don’t give me that! You were dead serious about that!”

“Of course not. But, any normal request would be boring, so maybe I should make it a cute one instead.”

“A...a cute request?”

“Please, boing, Kanade-sama! Let me stay over at your inn today, boing!’, maybe?”

“What is that ‘boing’ supposed to mean?!”

“Isn’t it cute, Usagi-san?”

“It’s Usami! I’m not a rabbit!”

“Ah, do a proper rabbit pose as well while you’re at it.”

“~~~! S-So this is who you really are...!”

“Now everyone, let us watch Usami-san say these embarrassing words in the middle of a crowded beach, with a bikini and lewd pose.”

“N-Nooooooooo~!” Masamune started tearing up again.

...This isn’t good. She chose the wrong enemy there. Suzutsuki Kanade isn’t a demon. She’s the devil reincarnated.

“Urk...” Masamune bit her lip, and... “P-Please, boing, Kanade-sama! Let me stay over at your inn today, boing!”

In the end, she went along with Suzutsuki’s request. Her face was red from the shame and embarrassment, as she put both her hands on her head, forming rabbit ears. Honestly speaking, it looked so different

from her usual, it was actually pretty adorable, but if I said that out loud, I'd probably be kicked.



“Thank you, Usami-san. I’ll let you stay over tonight.”

“Y-You better remember this, Suzutsuki Kanade. I’ll study even more, and definitely beat you during the next exams!”

“Oh, that reminds me. Why won’t the other two stay over as well. The more the merrier, as they say.”

“Yay! Thanks, Onee-sama!”

“Are you listening to me!? Also, why aren’t you making them do anything!?”

“Fufu, seems like it’ll be noisy tonight.”

“Listen to other people!”

Suzutsuki smiled gently, Kureha got excited, Masamune was gritting her teeth in anger, Nakuru was still frozen and stiff, and Konoe was unsure of what to do in her new persona as Takanashi Punyuru... Well, just as Suzutsuki said, things will surely get more noisy tonight. Not to mention that it’s all cute girls. Of course, it’s not like I was secretly in joy over the creation of my own harem. I was just thinking that with so many girls around, it’ll surely help with my gynophobia. Though, I have this vague feeling that it’ll only make things worse...

“—It pains me to say it, but the fun is over now.”

Suddenly, I heard a husky voice with no warning whatsoever. We all turned towards the voice, only to find a large man with a butler uniform unbefitting of the location and time—

“I’ve come to pick you up, Kanade-ojousama.” It was Konoe Nagare, the other butler of the Suzutsuki Family.

He gave this harsh comment, as she pushed up his glasses, and lowered his head in a polite way.

1 A Detective Conan reference

2 Reference to an old story about Musashibou Benkei and Minamoto no Yoshitsune.

Chapter 3: Five Seconds Before Smoking Slaughter!

“You’re back, Jirou.”

I returned to our room in the inn after taking a bath, when it was just Konoe waiting for me, wearing a yukata.

“Where are the others?”

“The young lady and the others most likely are still taking a bath. Since they’re a lot of girls, they must be talking a lot.”

“I see. But, I’m glad that we all got to stay here.”

“You’re right. I didn’t think you’d be able to persuade Dad like that.” Konoe muttered with a somewhat surprised tone.

After the appearance of that old fart, I somehow managed to stop him from dragging Konoe and Suzutsuki home. At the very end, we were about to beat each other’s faces in, but we managed to agree to a fair conclusion, and got permission to continue this trip.

“Good, right? I feel like the distance between me and that old fart shrunk as well, though sadly a bit too literal in that case. Not to mention that this feels like a school trip, so I’m having fun.”

We were all staying in the same room. Luckily, it was a fairly large room, but I wouldn’t have complained if Konoe and I stayed in a different room.

“...Yeah. Dinner was delicious as well.”

“You ate lots after all.”

“Wha...Of course not! Usami ate even more than me!” Konoe pouted aggressively.

Well, he's not wrong. Since Masamune always ate bread with mayonnaise, a luxurious dinner at an inn must have been like she was in heaven. After seriously asking me 'Hey...stupid chicken, how do you eat crabs?', she turned into an eating machine.

"But, I'm really glad."

"Eh?" I swallowed my breath.

Konoe slowly opened up the obi of his yukata, exposing his upper body.

"K-Konoe!?" I felt my heart skip a beat.

It felt like a thousand needles stabbed into my body. The opened yukata revealed his glossy hair, his slender shoulders, the graceful line his collarbone drew, his elegant chest below, and even his reddened cheeks—this was Konoe Subaru. The prince of our school was now blushing furiously, as he approached me on the tatami mats.

"Yeah, I really am glad...That I could be alone with Jirou like this..."

"K-Konoe..." I found trouble breathing.

In front of me was Subaru's body, so beautiful and yet fragile like glass. It held a forbidden charm, making me worried that he would break with a single hug. Even his physique resembled a girl's more than that of a boy. There, his slender arms wrapped around my body.

"H-Hey, they will come back soon."

"It's fine, we still have some more time...Just a bit more..." Konoe muttered like he was begging for something, and buried his head in my chest.

Our bare skin touched, and I felt his warmth. Our hearts beat mixed together to fill the room. In order to respond to his feelings, I carefully put my arms around his back.

"...J-Jirou."

"Hm?"

“P-Please...hug me more tightly...”

“...Understood, Subaru-sama.”

“M-Moron! Don’t call me that!”

“You don’t like it?”

“I-It’s not that...it just feels so ticklish...”

“Should be fine then, right?”

“Urk...you’re such a bully...!” Konoe’s faint resistance disappeared into the silence.

Just as he ordered me to, I tightly embraced him, to which he let out an adorable moan. Even while embracing him, I was worried about putting too much strength into my arms. I was worried about leaving marks like you’d do when walking along snow.

“...Jirou...” Inside my chest, he slowly raised his head.

Konoe’s facial features were at a distance close enough our breathing could touch. Not to mention his translucent eyes that looked only at me. His expression was filled with expectation, but also faint embarrassment.

“...Konoe.” I slowly closed the distance between us, while preparing myself.

“...Ah, wait.” Konoe seemingly realized something, and stopped me.

I stopped my preparations, to which Konoe slowly moved his crimson red lips—

“—You can keep your glasses on.”

“...Oh, right.” I moved my hands away from my glasses.

Really, what a blunder. I almost ruined it all. Konoe—really loves it when I wear glasses after all.

“...Subaru.” I gently called out his name, and put my lips on his—

♂ × ♂

“Ahhhhhhhhhhhh! What are you doing, Senpai!?”

Inside a room of the hot spring inn, I had just finished reading through the notes that were left behind on the desk, when I heard Nakuru’s shocked voice behind me. I mean, that’s my phrase, you know.

“You wench! Explain yourself immediately!”

“E-Explain?”

“What is the meaning behind this erotic novel of me and Konoe!?”

After finishing dinner and coming out of the bath, nobody was in our room. I thought I might as well relax a bit and wait for them, only to find this notebook on the desk that said ‘Secrets’ on it. I do feel bad for just looking at it without her permission, but this is just...you know. I should have expected as much. The writing was pretty cute at least.

“An erotic novel!? Don’t you dare call it that way, Senpai!”

“It’s not wrong, is it.”

“It’s a documentary novel that used Senpai and Subaru-sama as material!”

“It’s not even a documentary!”

“You violently invaded a maiden’s secrets!”

“And you disregarded my basic rights as a human being!”

“Urk...it can’t be helped, Nakuru will properly explain herself. That is the love novel that Nakuru was working on recently, called ‘Glass Memories’, and the manuscript of the 13th volume...”

“That’s not the explanation I was hoping for!”

I wanted to know why you’re even writing this! Also what do you

mean by 13th volume!? Has this been going on for so long!?

“Thanks to your help, GlassMemo has been getting a lot of great reviews.”

“Don’t give it an abbreviation!”

“By the way, even Nakuru’s mother loved it.”

“You let your mother read this thing!?”

“Mom is the type of person who understands.”

“I don’t want to be understood!”

What...a shock this is. I knew that Nakuru was using me and Konoe as some material for her stuff, but seeing the real deal is making me depressed.

“Also, I don’t even talk that way. The monologues are different, like it’s a different person.”

“We’ll just make that reader’s service. Nakuru is still in the middle of writing, so she can fix it later.”

“In the middle...”

Makes sense why the situation felt odd. She probably is planning on using this trip as an endless supply of material.

“The story at the beach is different as well. Why did me and that old fart fight each other?”

“Eh, that’s not necessarily wrong, right? Subaru-sama’s father was defeated back at the beach after all.”

“You’re not wrong...Also, what happened to that old man anyway?”

“He was drinking whisky at the bar on the first floor, crying to himself.”

“...I somehow feel bad now.”

What happened at the beach must have been a harsh shock for him. Thanks to that however, all of us could stay here at the inn. That's right, today at the beach, a fierce Konoe Subaru vs Konoe Nagare battle happened. It was a reinstallment of the previous fight they had, just the summer break arc version.

♀ × ♂

“Hey, do you know who this is?”

In front of the beach house, Suzutsuki asked Konoe with a somewhat cold voice.

“Wha...” The old man's cool attitude vanished elsewhere, as he looked at his master in shock.

Ignoring him however, Konoe and Suzutsuki continued their conversation.

“Young...No, Kana-oneechan, what are you talking about?”

“Hmm, maybe you don't remember him because he never left any impression. This person is Konoe Nagare, and is the butler of my father.”

“...Huh, I see.”

“By the way, he is also your cousin Subaru's father. They might be related, but they don't really resemble each other.”

“K-Kanade-ojousama? Just what are you talking about...?” The old man was shaken.

...Suzutsuki Kanade is a terrifying being, I yet again realized. To think she would use this situation to shake off the old man who came to take them back. Then again, this was also necessary to hide the fact that Takanashi Punyuru is actually Konoe Subaru. Masamune and Kureha weren't saying anything for a while now, confused at the situation. Nakuru was still frozen on her end.

“S-Subaru? What is going on? Can you explain it to me in a way that I understand?”

“A-Ahaha, I don’t quite get what you’re talking about, Konoe-san.”

“Konoe-san!? Why are you calling me that way!? Why are you using polite language towards me!?”

“I-It’s not weird at all. Even if we are relatives, we rarely ever met. It’s much more rational to address you that way.”

“Urk...!”

“Fufu, that’s right. This girl might look like your own son, you can’t act too friendly with her. You’re not related by blood after all.”

“.....!”

After a bit of thinking time, the old man came up with a hypothesis of his own, saying something like ‘Did they suffer from memory loss...?’. Old man, wake up. Your adolescent daughter is just rejecting you.

“Subaru! Remember! I’m your Dad!”

“N-No, get away from me!”

“Don’t worry! I remember everything! We can go home and watch old videos together! We can go from the first time you called me ‘Papa’ all the way to you trying hard to eat bell peppers!”

“...! I’m scared, Kana-oneechan! Some random person is harassing me!”

“Random person!?”

“Nagare, calm down. You’re scaring Punyuru.”

“Punyuru!? Who!?”

“Kana-oneechan, that person is weird...Is he always acting like this with children? If so, then I’m sure Subaru must be sick of him by now.”

“Gaha!?”

“Yes, you are right. He talked to me about it before. Apparently he tried to take baths with him even after entering high school. Not to mention with blood-shot eyes.”

“N-No way! Taking a bath together is a means of communication.”

“...Gross.”

“Geho!?”

“Are you not aware that you are raising a child that has just entered their adolescence?”

“Ugh!?”

Beneath the mid-summer sun, the old man staggered back and forth after receiving several lethal blows. That’s master and butler for you, they’re giving the old fart an endless two-hit combo. It’s like I’m watching two sushi chefs absolutely going ham on those fish.

“S-Subaru, I beg you, let’s go back together. Just convince the young lady...” The old man was pleading with tears in his eyes.

His expression was filled with panic and despair, like he was begging for his own life. However...

“...No.”

This was probably meant to deal the most damage to the person who attempted to forcefully drag them home. Konoe...No, Takanashi Punyuru directly rejected her old man. And, stabbed a knife into his chest.

“Stop this already. If not... I will call the police, okay?”

♀ × ♂

Alright, end of flashback. Thanks to Suzutsuki’s support, the Konoe Family’s quarrel ended in a one-sided crushing defeat for the old man. Denied by master and daughter, the old fart said ‘At least let me join you as a guardian...’, and joined us for this trip. I bet that he came here under the orders of Suzutsuki’s father, but he apparently

gave up on bringing them back for now.

On a side note, we introduced Kureha's group as people who came to support our elopement, and the old man as an enemy who tried to take us back. Our supporters were welcomed warmly with some luxurious dinner, whereas the old man got some fast food, and was basically bullied away. Even I'm starting to feel bad for this guy now.

"...Hm?"

There, I realized something. How did that old man even find out where we are? The people working at this inn should not have leaked anything. Did they put some tracking device on them? No, they wouldn't go so far with their own master. Basically...it might be related to the reason they ran away from home?

I'm not as dubious as Masamune, but something's fishy with this trip. We're talking about that rich lady after all, so saying that she didn't want to go overseas, or that she did this to help me...that seems to be some pretense, and that she's hiding another reason behind that. I don't know what that is, but Konoe seems hesitant to tell me.

Well, I won't be able to unravel it myself, so I'll just stand by and watch.

"Even so, you changed the situation at the beach way too much."

"But...a brawl would be much more spicy, right?"

"Spicy?"

"Roars of rage, flying fists, glasses ramming against the other, a battle to the death. And then, the long-awaited glasses x glasses..."

"Shut up, or I'll forcefully make you."

"Eh? N-No way...this is the part where you go 'Ready for a deep kiss?', you know..."

"That's not what I meant!"

Maybe I really should make her shut up. I mean, glasses x glasses...?

She's probably swimming in a sea of rotten ideas in her head. I really wish she'd come back to the world of normal living.

"Unya...Nakuru is sorry." Nakuru apologized.

Despite being in the handicrafts club, she sure is weak. In the eyes of the world, that might be normal, but there's Kureha and Masamune after all.

"It can't be helped. Nakuru will accept your punishment to make up for her sins."

"Punishment?"

"Now! Do whatever you want with Nakuru's body!"

"Don't phrase it in a way that would invite misunderstandings!"

"Huh? Would you prefer if Nakuru did whatever she wanted with your body instead?"

"No! Also, how did you even arrive at that!?"

"Eh? Well, in Nakuru's novels, Senpai is always...Huehuehue. Apologies, forget I said anything."

"I know full well what you were trying to say!"

"Either way is fine! You could even have me take a bath in a boiling hot coke filled tub!"

"I don't want to make you physically suffer, okay!"

Oh yeah, she said that she was bad with carbohydrates back at the school festival. Even if she tells me that anything is fine...Her breasts...Wait no, going for a straight ball is definitely the wrong way. That's why I should...

".....Cat ears."

"What?"

"Ah, well, I was curious because I saw you wear it at the beach

before. What are they about?”

“! Ah, that...”

For some reason, Nakuru put her hands on the cat ears and lowered her head. Eh? What kind of reaction is that? They’re not the real deal, right?

“.....”

On a whim, I reached for those cat ears.

“...No...” I ignored that faint attempt of rebelling, and touched those cat ears.

Oh, they’re accessories, huh. Well, I guess they’re a type of fashion like this.

“Ah...nya...S-Senpai, no...” Nakuru’s face distorted in embarrassment.

Still, this sensation could become a habit, it just feels so soft on my palms...

“...Hmpf. So you’re back, Jirou.”

Hearing that voice, I froze up, and turned towards it. Immediately, I was greeted by Konoe in her yukata appearance, carrying coffee milk in her hands which she probably just bought. By the way, she’s in her male butler mode. We made it so that Takanashi Punyuru went back to her family, and managed to smoothly switch them. If not, it’d be weird for the people at the inn after all.

“Ah, Subaru-sama, great timing.”

The second Nakuru saw Konoe, she flashed a truly unsettling smile, like she came up with a great idea. Where is that limitless energy coming from?

“W-What? Are you having some weird plans on making Konoe do something weird again?”

“Yes. If Nakuru is to get a punishment anyway, it’s better to at least enjoy herself.” With some oddly sinister statement, she took out a piece of paper with a weird illustration on it...

Wait, hold on a damn second!

“Wha...that’s!”

Seeing it, Subaru-sama was baffled all the same. What Nakuru held in her hand was undoubtedly a butler ticket. This ticket allows you to rent Konoe Subaru for a single order. Since I had used this back in April, I knew how it worked, and thus was terrified to see it in Nakuru’s possession.

“Fufu, this was actually a prize for the person who scored the most points during the last Subaru-sama Cult Quiz Contest at the school festival...But, Nakuru didn’t expect to receive something so wonderful.”

“...H-Huh. Good for you, I guess...” I calmly responded, but was sweating buckets in reality.

...How could this happen. To think she was the top player at that contest. Not to mention making a butler ticket the prize? This isn’t just the level of making someone strong even stronger, this is like you gave Oda Nobunaga a nuclear missile.

“Now then, what should Nakuru make you do~” Nakuru struck the thinking man’s pose., as she started thinking, only to raise her head with an ‘Ah, I know’, a light bulb popping up above her head. “Since we’re here already, how about Nakuru makes you help with her creative writing. Please read these lines out loud.” She said, and ripped the butler ticket in two.

This was the signal to start.

“Lines?”

“Yes, in these notes. Ahh, having them read by someone is quite embarrassing.”

“?”

Seemingly thinking that something was off, Konoe accepted the notebook from Nakuru, and read through the contents...only for her eyes to open wide in shock.

“Don’t joke with me! A-As if I could reenact such a lewd novel!”

“Ah, you only have to say the lines. Naturally, aimed at Senpai.”

“!?”

“Ohh? What’s wrong? Subaru-sama, you are Nakuru’s butler right now, aren’t you. If so, then you need to listen to Nakuru’s orders. Come on, start from there.” Nakuru pointed at a page with a grin.

“Urk~~~!” Subaru-sama started blushing furiously, and bit her lip.

“...J-Jirou.”

“Subaru-sama, louder.”

“...! J-Jirou..P-Please...h-h-h-hug me more tightly...”

“And this is where you heard Senpai’s sweet whispering.

“~~~! M-Moron, don’t call me that!”

“Subaru-sama gets asked if he hates it, but he actually doesn’t.”

I-It’s not that...it just feels so t-t-t-ticklish...”

“And, with even more embarrassment.

“Urk...You’re such a b-bully..!”

“This is the climax, so go all out.”

“Urgh...J-Jirou.”

Maybe she got a bit too into it, but Konoe gently raised her eyes from the script, and looked up at me with dampened eyes.

“.....!” I subconsciously averted my gaze.

I mean...you know? It's not intentional, but I'm feeling like I understand the feelings of the me inside the novel. After all...I really want to hug her right now...

"Now, continue. This phrase emphasizes Subaru-sama's feelings, as he finds himself inside the arms of his beloved person, being spoiled like a child."

"~~~!"

"Come on, say it!"

"...A-Ah, w-w-wait...your glasses..."

"The glasses?"

"T-The glasses...D-Don't..."

"...Don't?"

"Don't...don't...don't...! Unyaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!"

Unable to bear with it any longer, Butler-kun screamed. Or rather, she collapsed. After screaming, she threw the script like she was at the Major Baseball League, right outside the window.

"Ahhh! Don't leave Nakuruuuuu!"

Without any build-up, Nakuru jumped after the notebook, right outside the window. She was screaming something like 'I can fly!' right before doing so, but I know how humans admire birds and their ability to fly. She managed to catch the notes mid-jump, and flashed an angelic smile—as she disappeared from our field of view. R-Rather...did she fall?

"...Huh?"

Wait, on which floor was this room again? It at least wasn't the first floor, so maybe...the second? I feel like she'd probably suffer from an impact like she was hit by a car. But, she should be fine. I lived through getting run over by a truck, so she'll probably come back with some comedy manga trope along the lines of 'Aha, Nakuru

didn't actually jump~!' or something like that. Yeah, that must be it. I can only believe that to be the case.

"Jirou, do you mind checking for her safety?"

Urk...

"Also, please burn that notebook. To me, that book is more dangerous than the Dea*h Note." Konoe said as she looked towards the window.

I mean, I'm more than surprised you even know about that manga, but why do I have to be the one to go?

"Come on, hurry up and go!" Subaru-sama said without looking at my face.

...Hm? Don't tell me...

"Are you too embarrassed to look at my face right now?"

"...!"

I seemed to have hit the mark, because Subaru-sama was panicking, her eyes wandering all over the place. Well, I can't blame her. After being forced to read that kind of stuff, you'd be embarrassed to be around the guy.

"W-Who cares about that! Just hurry up and go!" She scolded me.

Still a bit hesitant, I agreed. I didn't want to make her any more angry than this after all.

"...But, it is a bit regrettable."

Suddenly, I heard this voice behind my back.

"If at least, a bit further..." I heard Konoe's faint mutter, but since I didn't understand what she meant by that, I ignored it and left the room.

♀ × ♂

“Nii-san, do you have a moment?”

Right when I left the room, my little sister called out to me. Or more accurately, she put my head in a headlock. Ahhh, my head! My skull is going to crack! And my gynophobia is activating! Goosebumps!

“Hurry up and come over here.” Kureha said as she literally dragged me along.

We arrived at an empty room, directly located next to ours. Since we rented this entire inn, no guests but us were currently in this inn after all. Making it here, Kureha finally released me. I think she just finished her bath, because her hair was still a bit wet.

“Yup, this should be fine. Huh? What’s wrong, Nii-san, why are you so out of breath?”

“...You really don’t know?”

“Practicing the Lamaze technique¹?”

“I have no plans for childbirth at the moment, so no.”

“Then why? Shouldn’t this be no big deal for you?” Kureha smiled innocently.

Well, it’s not like I’m gasping for air, so it’s fine.

“So, what do you want? I’m a bit busy myself right now.”

I really don’t want to be involved in that girl’s death. Even worse if that notebook turns into some kind of memento. Imagine the police going ‘She was carrying this notebook right before she died. The contents of it is a novel in progress...’, or something like that. My life would be over.

“...Yeah, but...I have something important to talk about as well.” Kureha looked at me with a rarely serious expression. “Nii-san, does your heart race faster when looking at my body?”

“.....” My head hurts.

What is my little sister asking me?

“H-Hey! Don’t make that kind of face! I’m being serious here!”
Kureha pouted.

Even if you say that...I don’t think she’s asking in the incestuous way, so maybe just simply regarding her charm as a girl? But, where did that come from...

“Listen, we girls all took a bath just now.” Kureha spoke up.

Ahh, I figured they were all taking one together.

“So then...I saw everyone’s naked bodies...”

“Ahhh...”

I get what she’s playing at. Basically, she’s worried that her own growth can’t compare to the girls around them. Well, she does look more like a loli after all.

“Onee-sama has the body of a model after all, Usamin-senpai might be a bit more slender around the area, but still has beautiful breasts, and NaruNaru...” Speaking that far, Kureha suddenly went quiet.

Yeah, her only hope as a fellow first-year student was Nakuru, and yet she was betrayed...

“What should I do, Nii-san...Will I always stay like this...?” Kureha muttered with a dejected tone.

...Urgh, she’s actually crying for real now. She was letting out hics and sniffs, as large grains of tears ran down her cheeks.

“H-Hey, don’t just start crying.”

“Wahh...Hic...Y-Yeah, sorry...” Kureha wiped away her tears. “But, I’m sure that Konoe-senpai likes bigger ones. I don’t want him to hate me...”

“He wouldn’t hate you just because of that.”

After all, she's crossdressing as a guy. She probably doesn't even look at them.

"Since we're on a trip together, I was hoping to use this as a chance to close the distance between us..."

"Chance?"

"...Yeah. Like, showing how weak and fragile of a girl I am to make him conscious of me." Kureha took out a can of juice from somewhere. "I was thinking of holding this, and saying 'Ahh, I can't open the lid. Oh, Senpai, could you open this for me~' while I looked up at him. That makes every guy easy, right?"

"It's as meta as it can get."

Also, there exists no single can of juice you can't open. Use your strength to impress her at least.

"If this succeeds, then Konoe-senpai will invite me with 'Kureha-chan, let's sleep together tonight', and our night adventure will begin..."

"Calm down, my little sister. Tonight, we have the observant guardian old fart here as well."

"B-But, there's a lot of rivals! See Usamin-senpai and NaruNaru. They're both members of his fanclub."

"They're both?"

Does she not know that Masamune left the fanclub?

"Not to mention...they're both in the handicrafts club. There might be a time where we have to go all out."

"Our school's handicrafts club is as crazy as always, huh."

I really feel like not knowing what they were doing would let me sleep easier at night. I mean, hunting bears in the mountains, doing survival training on a deserted island, and all that. Not to mention that they have an internal ranking according to what I heard during

the school festival...

"If they act, then you stop them. You're probably the top rank on the club's internal ranking, right?"

She's the oldest daughter of the Sakamachi Family after all. She's been trained by Mom ever since she was a young girl, turning her into a little monster. I don't know anybody who could win against her...

"...No, not really." However, Kureha denied my assumptions. "I'm the third rank."

"...What?"

"I'm third in the ranking. Last spring when we did the newcomer welcoming party, we had a ranking battle, and I ended up in third."

"....."

...Seriously? Kureha is 3rd? Are you kidding me? There's two people stronger than Kureha in the handicrafts club?

"Well, the ranking battle was pretty much a battle royale. I tried my best, but the two third-year Senpais were just on a different level. Not to mention..."

"Not to mention?"

"...No, that's not important right now. I'd rather not remember." Kureha changed the topic.

Eh, what's up with that. Did something happen that induced some kind of trauma? How dangerous are those two Senpais? Rouran Academy's handicraft club feels more like some fight club.

"Anyway, I just wanted to know if you think that I'm a charming girl, speaking from a boy's perspective."

"Even if you ask me that..."

"Please. I can only rely on you for that..."

“Hmmm...”

Charming, huh. I mean, she's cute alright, but that face of hers is still young. Can't say that she's got a good style either. At worst, she looks like a middle school student. Only a small group of people would probably be interested in her body.

“Here, take a good look.”

As I was lost in thought, Kureha suddenly opened up the collar of her yukata, and...Now hold on, why is she suddenly taking off her clothes?

“K-Kureha!?”

She's almost like Konoe in that erotic novel Nakuru wrote. Through the opening of the yukata, I could see adorable pink underwear with a glass marble design on it.

“Y-You! What are you doing!?”

“Eh, I mean, this would make it easier for you to see my body, right.”

“Because of such a simple reason!?”

“? Why are you panicking like that? I'm properly wearing underwear, right. We took so many baths together, this is nothing new, right?”

“Urk...”

Really? No, that's definitely not it. Siblings in this world shouldn't be so close. I always get beat up at home after all.

“C-Come on, Nii-san...what do you think?” Slightly embarrassed, Kureha asked me.

Her body was small to the point it was unreasonable that she was in high school. Her skin was as smooth as a raw egg, and a faint scent of shampoo drifted over towards me.

“.....”

C-Calm down, me. This is my little sister, Sakamachi Kureha. She's the little monster of my family. Ahh, that's why. Normally I'm being used as a punching bag, so seeing her suddenly strip and embarrassed creates this gap which makes my brain go crazy.



“Nii-san...have a closer look.” While looking up at me, Kureha approached me like a kitten asking for food.

Stop it already, I beg you! I get it already, you're plenty charming yourself, so don't get any closer...!

“—W-What are you two doing?” I heard a baffled voice behind me.

Turning around, there stood Usami Masamune in a yukata of her own. She stared at me and Kureha in disbelief.

“U-Usamin-senpai! You're wrong, this isn't what you think this is!” Kureha panicked, and fixed her yukata.

...Thank god it's the nasty rabbit at least. If Kureha just properly explains the situation, we will get off without any misunderstanding...

“I didn't want to do this, but...Nii-san would not listen to me...”

“What are you sayiiiiing!?” I threw in a retort.

There, Kureha whispered close to me.

“I can't help it! I can't tell her that I was shocked to see their naked bodies in the bath!”

“I mean, I get it, but...”

Why do you have to phrase it that way then? You're just worsening my image. Ahh, she'll definitely get the wrong idea. I slowly returned my gaze towards Masamune...

“...Hm, I see.” Surprisingly enough, Masamune just let out a sigh, and nodded. “Anyway, Sakamachi. Why don't you go back to the room, Nakuru was looking for you.”

“Eh? NaruNaru was?”

“I met her outside the bath just now. She fell out of the window just now. Luckily she doesn't seem hurt, but she got some scratches, so she'd like some bandaids. You brought some with you right?”

“Y-Yes! Anyway, I'll go back to the room!” Kureha seemed to be embarrassed, as she rushed outside.

...Eh? What's this abruptness? I thought she'd chew us out.

"Stupid chicken, you should be more careful. Knowing that this was about you, you probably had a particular reason for that, but anybody but me would have definitely gotten the wrong idea."

"...Why are you so calm?" I couldn't help but ask.

"No reason? You're blood-related, right? It's not that weird if one of you was just wearing underwear."

"Hm..."

She's not wrong. At home, Kureha's always wearing fairly loose clothes. Even when she's coming out of the bath, she's mostly wearing her underwear as she gulps down her milk. Maybe I'm just the weird guy for getting oddly conscious of her? Maybe it's because of that novel that I was just feeling weird.

"That's right, since you're siblings—family, this much is normal." Masamune spoke with full confidence. "More importantly, let's go back to the room. Suzutsuki Kanade brought cards with her, so we'll be playing daifugō. Though she apparently hates when I call it at." Masamune complained, but took me with her.

Well, whatever. As long as she didn't get any weird misunderstandings, it's all okay.

"...Hm?"

There, a certain doubt popped up in my head. Why did Masamune come to the room next to ours after leaving the bath, and not the one we stayed at? I feel like it was a straight line there.

"...Did you mistake the room?"

"...!"

I just blurted out what popped up in my head, but I guess I hit the mark. Looking over, Masamune bit her lip in embarrassment.

"O-Of course not! I was actually looking for you!" She screamed in

embarrassment, and let out a 'Hmpf'.

And this time, after confirming it was the right room, she walked inside.

♀ × ♂

As expected, the night turned into a cards tournament. I mean, hearing about this, you might be screaming 'I'll kill you, damn normie!', but reality is often disappointing. Because of Suzutsuki and Masamune not being able to stand each other, every card game turned into a bloody war. Betrayal, conspiracy, everything you could imagine. Of course, we weren't actually betting money or anything. We're benevolent high school students after all.

Thus, the passionate cards tournament ended at midnight. With that flow, we all went to bed. Or that was the plan, but...

"...I can't sleep." Amidst the darkness, I muttered with a quiet voice.

Can you blame me, there's girls all over in this room. Suzutsuki said that 'With two boys in this room, we'll know if something bad happens', which is why they're all sleeping around me and Konoe. I'm feeling like I was sitting on a small boat, surrounded by alligators. With my gynophobia, this is getting close to torture. By the way, the old man is sleeping outside on the balcony.

He gave me a really sharp glare, but I wouldn't mind if he took over for me. Because of all the playing around this afternoon, I already fell asleep before, but after around an hour, I woke up because of a nightmare where I was thrown into the ocean bound up by chains all for the enjoyment of the girls. Despite it being summer, I was drenched in a cold sweat.

"Damn it..."

I should probably take another bath and freshen up again if things are like this. I can't sleep being this sweaty. Amidst the darkness, I carefully walked through the room. I couldn't tell too well, but I think everyone was sound asleep. I slipped out of the room while trying my best to not wake up anybody.

“Damn, they really rented out this entire place.”

It might be a bit late for that, but I couldn’t help muttering these words in the face of the absolutely empty hallway. Thinking that it’s just us in this large inn was kinda odd.

“...Oh yeah, why did Suzutsuki even come here?” Maybe because of the silence around me, I talked to myself yet again.

I’ve been wondering about this for a while. Suzutsuki said that she didn’t want to go on a trip overseas. But, whether it’s overseas or in Japan, she’s still on a trip, so what’s the difference? Not to mention that apparently it was a reason that was hard to tell me. How did the old fart even find us here in the first place?

“Hmm...Gonna think about it in the bath.” While muttering to myself, I reached the men’s bath.

As expected from this luxurious inn, the hot spring was as bourgeois as you could expect. Not to mention there’s two types. One large bathroom, and one open-air bath.

“...Alright.”

I took off my clothes in the changing room, and put them into the clothes basket. Just to make sure, I took a towel with me. If I don’t hide my personal bits even at home, I can’t calm down. Then again, I’m alone right now. I wrapped the towel around my waist, and started humming. I might as well enjoy the open-air bath since I’m here already. Onwards to the hot spring, I opened the door—

“J-Jirou!?”

Right there, a shocked alto voice reached my ears. The sky was filled with stars, and showered by their light was an oddly familiar face.

“Ko...Konoe!?”

That’s right, there stood Konoe Subaru. She was undoubtedly present in the open-air bath.

“W-Why are you here!?”

This is the men's bath...Ah, right. She's technically acting as a boy right now. She can't exactly use the women's bath after all. If someone but Suzutsuki found her there, the secret would be out. Also, don't tell me...

"Were you waiting for this timing?"

"...!?"

Hearing my words, Konoe growled. Guess I was right. I bet the card games got in her way. Since there was no other moment of chance for her, she probably slipped out while we were all sleeping.

"Why are you here, Jirou! You should be sleeping right now!"

"Well, I happened to wake up."

"Wha...Also, didn't you already take a bath! I was always waiting to finally get a chance!"

"E-Even if you say that..."

"Not to mention...because of the sea water, my hair..."

"Ahh, that's why you were rushing to take a bath, huh. You could have just told me, I would have stayed away if I knew."

"B-But..."

"But?"

"Knowing it's you, you probably would have tried to take a peek, right?"

"Why!?"

"The young lady told me that 'All men are horny wolves'."

"She's the only wolf here!"

...Wait, why am I just normally talking with Konoe! Confirming the situation, Konoe Subaru stood in front of me, revealing a lot of her white skin, and her faintly red cheeks. Her hair was still a bit

drenched from the water. Since entering the bath with a towel would be bad manners, she was not covered by anything...

“~~~! S-Stop looking! Just hurry up and get out!” Konoe embraced her body as she sank deeper into the water.

For some reason, her gaze even evaded me...Wait, I forgot. I'm wearing only a towel right now.

“S-Sorry to get in your way!” I reflexively apologized, and took a U-turn.

Alright, no bath for tonight. The sweat isn't that big of a problem. In fact, I feel exhausted, so I should be able to sleep soon enough. With these thoughts, I put my hand on the changing room's door, when...

“—Hm? Is someone in there?”

Through the door, I heard a husky voice. A voice that I would rather not remember, but knew too well—Konoe Nagare. For some reason, Konoe Subaru's father appeared.

“.....”

...Calm down, Sakamachi Kinjiro. Analyze the situation. If I go back now, I'll run into the old man, and he'll be faced with his beloved daughter...which then would result in a misunderstanding that I was taking a bath with Konoe! We're talking about that helicopter parent, if he finds out about this, I'm dead meat. I'll be the victim of a planned assassination. Even if I surrender, I'll be killed. I might be forced to cut my belly like in the old Edo period.

“...! Jirou, hurry up over here!”

Konoe must have sensed the danger of the situation, or didn't want me to be killed by her own father, as she beckoned me over to the open-air bath. No other choice, huh. We should work together in order to get out of this situation.

“Konoe, can you hide behind my back?”

While hopping into the hot water, I sat as far away as possible from

the door. Since I have wider shoulders than Konoe, it'd be best if she sat right behind me. Luckily, a lot of steam covered the area as well.

"Yeah, it should be fine as long as I keep everything but my head in the water...!" Konoe said, as she put her back against mine, sinking deeper into the water.

EEK, this is going to activate my gynophobia again! But, letting out a nosebleed here is too dangerous, so I somehow need to hide it...!

"So it was you, shitty brat."

The door opened, and the old man set foot onto the open-air bath. He at least was wearing a towel around his waist.

"Y-Yeah. What are you doing here so late? It's midnight." I tried my best to deal with the symptoms of my gynophobia, and answered.

However, my goosebumps would not stop the entire time. They were running along my skin non-stop.

"Well, I woke up in the middle of the night, and saw that your futon was empty, so I figured you might be taking a bath, which is why I came here." The old man wiped his glasses to clear it off the fog glued to it.

Judging from that, he didn't realize that Konoe's futon was empty. If he did, I would probably be dead by now.

"The thing is, I actually wanted to talk with you." The old man spoke up with an oddly serious expression.

...? I wonder what it is. Maybe about this trip? Perhaps he can tell me what's going on with this whole elopement mess...

"What relationship do you have with my daughter?"

I almost fell over in the bath hearing that question.

"Hm? What's that reaction for? Don't tell me...did it already happen?!"

“Did what happen!?”

“Hm, what are you saying. You’re in high school, do you really need me to teach you sex ed right now?”

“...Rest assured, we’re just friends. We don’t have that kind of relationship.”

“Really?”

“Yeah. We’re just good classmates. Nothing more, nothing less.”

That is how things should stand, unless my estimation is wrong.

“Hmpf.”

For some reason, I heard a displeased voice behind my back. Konoe I beg you, just don’t talk right now. Would you have preferred if I called us good friends?

“Hm, that’s fine then. Well, knowing Subaru, I doubt something like this would happen.” The old man let out a satisfied sigh.

He’s as much of a helicopter parent as always. He sees some colors as soon as it’s about his daughter, almost like a chameleon.

“Guess I was just needlessly worrying.”

“Needlessly worrying?”

“...Well, it just seemed like Subaru was looking forward to school more and more recently.”

There, I felt Konoe twitch behind my back, only for her shoulders to start shaking.

“This has never happened before, so I was just a bit curious.”

“Huh. I guess you are worried after all.”

“Heh, of course. Which parent is not worried about their children? Not to mention that it’s Subaru. I mean, look how cute she is.”

Without waiting for my response, the old fart continued telling me stories of how Konoe was bitten by a puppy before, how she was scared of ghosts and snuck into his bed, how she said that she'd become Papa's wife in the future once she's grown up...and many more.

I think you should stop right there, old man. I don't mind hearing more about this, but your daughter is reaching a limit. I've been hearing ominous 'Kill...kill...kill' muttering behind my back for a while now. Not like I can blame her, it's mighty embarrassing to have your parents reveal past stories when you were a child.

"What do you think? Did you finally understand how cute my daughter is?"

"Yeah, I sure did."

I also understand how hard she must have it. As soon as this battlefield here is done, Konoe will probably slaughter the old man without a moment's hesitation. To think love could hurt you so much, it's hard trying to raise a child, I bet.

"Well, that's also why I can't say anything with Kanade-ojousama running away from home."

"....."

Hold on a second, why is that being brought up right now?

"Hm? Wait, you haven't heard anything from the two?"

"I mean, Suzutsuki said that she didn't want to go on that overseas trip with her parents."

"Pretty much. However, there's a particular reason for that."

"Reason?"

The old man let out a sigh.

"—The death anniversary." He declared.

“Death anniversary? Hold on...”

“That’s right, the death anniversary of Subaru’s mother. It’s the day after tomorrow. The trip overseas overlapped with that date. Since Kanade-ojousama would be travelling, that naturally meant Subaru, her butler, would have to tag along as well. That would mean she can’t go to visit her mother’s grave the day after tomorrow.”

“.....”

“So far, she has visited her mother’s grave every year. If my job permits it, I do too. Well, since bringing back the young lady is pretty much impossible this year, I get to visit it myself this year.”

“Did you give up on taking them back already?”

“The main family just contacted me, saying they cancelled the trip. I know it must have cost them some other important business too. Really, what a moody master I have.” The old man sighed as he shook his head.

That means he really is just tagging along as our guardian for this trip, huh.

“Ah, one more thing I wanted to ask. How did you know we were here?”

I don’t think that Suzutsuki would just leak our destination anywhere. He must have found us by using some other tracking move.

“It’s simple. It could only be here. Remember? The day after tomorrow is the death anniversary.”

“The day after tomorrow...”

I see. So there’s not much time anymore. Thinking of Suzutuski’s plan, the goal of coming all the way out here for this whole elopement nonsense...

“Exactly. The grave of her mother is close to this inn. That’s why the young lady chose to hole up in here.”

“Don’t tell me...when she said that Konoe’s family was living close-by today at the beach...”

“It’s the truth mixed in with a lie. The Takanashi Family lives around here, and she sleeps in the grave close to it.”

“.....”

So that’s why she made up the lie of the elopement. In reality, Suzutsuki set up this plan for the sake of her own butler. Damn it, at least tell me about that. Am I the only one left out again? How am I supposed to know if you don’t tell me...Maybe there was a reason she couldn’t tell me? But, that at least cleared up a lot of doubts.

“.....”

No, not yet. Something is still off. Why is her mother’s grave at the Takanashi Family? Konoe’s family had been butlers for generations. I’m sure that Konoe’s mother must be a member of the Konoe Family as well. Then, why was she not allowed in the Konoe Family’s grave? Is that the reason why nobody could tell me the truth?

“I’ll be leaving now.”

“Hm? Pretty fast alright.”

“Yeah, I simply wanted to ask about your relationship with Subaru. Tomorrow we’ll go to the beach, and at night waits the summer festival. As your guardian, I need to be fresh for those events.” He left behind these words, and returned to the changing room.

...Finally saved. That took care of one battlefield. I was oddly focussed on my conversation with the old man, I didn’t even feel much about my symptoms. Also, I feel like Konoe was trying to be considerate, and tried not to touch my back too much.

“Konoe, it’s okay now.” I called out to the person behind my back, to which I got back a faint ‘...Yeah’.

I was about to turn around, purely out of reflex, and stopped myself. If I did that now, I’d definitely end up with a nosebleed.

“Also, the goal of this trip was to visit your mother’s grave?” I tried to not make things too awkward as I asked.

I bet they really had me tag along to fix my gynophobia, but the elopement was to deceive the inn.

“So, why didn’t you tell me?”

“T-That’s...”

I wonder why. Konoe suddenly grew silent, so it really must be a reason that’s hard to tell.

“J-Jirou, can we talk about that later?”

“Hm? Why?”

“T-The thing is...I’ve been holding back this entire time...”

“.....”

The...toilet? I imagined Konoe fidgeting nervously behind my back. Not to mention in her birthday suit...Wait, stop. Don’t imagine that. That’s taking things too far.

“H-Hurry up and leave then. The old man should be gone by now. I’ll turn my back towards you, so don’t worry about me seeing anything.”

“Urk...Y-Yeah, sorry.” I felt Konoe move behind me.

I heard it’s bad if you hold back for too long after all. There was a toilet in the changing room, so she should make it in—

“—Hey, shitty brat.”

However, across the changing room door, I heard an awfully cold and yet passionately aggressive husky voice.

“W-What, you’re still here?” I asked as calmly as I could manage.

...This is bad. I have an awful feeling about this situation.

“Well, I just wanted to ask something.”

“H-Huh, alright. Fire ahead.”

For some reason, his tone sounded much more aggressive than before. Like he’s fuming despite having left the bath. But, I couldn’t ask why that was, since I was terrified.

“...Well, I was just wondering. I found this casket with a yukata and female underwear in it, mind telling me who this belongs to?”

“.....”

...It’s over. Because there were lots of caskets in that changing room, I must have overseen it on my way in. I feel like something similar happened back during Golden Week, right. Before it was my little sister, and now it’s that old man. Imma be honest, I don’t feel like I can get out of this, alright.

“—Let me ask you.” Beneath the starry summer sky, the old man asked his question—and began this trial. “Does this belong to you?”

“Y-Yeah. I was actually into that sort of stuff...”

“Huh, quite the odd interest to have. You were wearing such cute underwear?”

“W-Well, it just calms me down, you know~ It’s like doing a popular diet.”

“Oh yeah, my daughter has the same underwear.”

“Eh!? R-Really, what a coincidence!”

“Oh, there’s male underwear in another basket over here.”

“That!? Ah...that’s what I put on my head! I wanna take the world by storm! It just refreshes my head!”

“Hahaha, don’t worry, my head couldn’t be more refreshed.”

“H-Huh, glad to hear that.”

“—Shitty brat.”

“W-What do you want, old fart.” I returned the question, to which the old man stayed quiet for a moment.

“Today...will be your death anniversary.”

The door shot open, and the old man came dashing towards me with blood-shot eyes. He sure changed quickly, because he was wearing his yukata.

“You shitty braaaaaaaaaaat! M-Mixed bathing!? Not to mention with Subaru...with my own daughter!?”

“C-Calm down, it was an accident!”

“No excuses! I will delete all memories from your rotten brain!”

“You’re going to kill me in the process!”

“Don’t you worry! I’ll rob your eyeballs from you, and rewatch everything you’ve seen for myself tonight!”

“What the hell happened to you?!”

It seems like the fact that her daughter was bathing with another man was so much of a shock it made him go bat-shit crazy. He was throwing curses at me, closing in...

“...!?”

The second he leaped through the steam and into the bath, his expression was distorted in shock. Suddenly, something jumped between me and the old man.

“Gyah!?”

Konoe’s beautiful jumping uppercut stabbed directly into the old man’s lower jaw, sending him flying, and slamming into the ground. He didn’t get up again.

“T-Thanks a bunch, Konoe! You saved—” I wanted to give her my

gratitude, only to stop mid-sentence.

“Kya!” Konoe let out an adorable shriek.

Konoe Subaru’s glossy hair was wet, droplets of water on her delicate arms and legs. Her skin was colored in a charming red. Her beautifully shaped collarbone and healthy breasts were in plain sight, as well as her adorable belly. Subaru-sama in her birthday suit stood right there. How do I say this...what a sight.



“...!?”

Immediately after, I felt killing intent approaching my cranium with a roundhouse kick. It was a flustered Konoe’s counterattack. Normally, I would have been able to defend myself, as we’ve been training a lot together as of late. I might have even been able to evade it. However, I couldn’t.

“Guha!?”

The intense impact slammed right into my skull, and slammed me to the ground. Even so, I had no regrets. My consciousness was starting to fade, and yet one thought stayed with me until the end.

“...Ah.”

I’m so glad to be alive.

[1](#) A childbirth technique developed in the 1940s

Chapter 4: What the Chicken Can Do for the Butler

“Stupid chicken, why are you tilting your head like this?”

During breakfast, in the large banquet hall, Masamune asked me these words.

“Well, I can’t remember much from last night, you know.” I picked up some cooked salmon with my chopsticks as I responded.

I remember that I took a bath last night, and happened to run into Konoe. We had to somehow deceive the old man that we weren’t bathing together, and managed to make it through that battlefield, but...I can’t seem to remember what happened after that. When I realized it, I woke up in the open-air bath.

“Konoe, do you know something?”

“No idea. I don’t know anything.” Konoe just averted her gaze.

Hmm, maybe I just fell asleep because I was so tired.

“Urk...” The old man was rubbing his cheek in pain, as she munched on his breakfast (yet again cold fast food).

Apparently he was missing some memories as well. Not to mention that he forgot everything even right upon entering the bath. Just what happened at that open-air bath...

“Huh? Konoe-senpai, what’s wrong? You’re lacking a bit of your usual energy, right.”

“Hmmm, Subaru-sama, you should eat some more...”

Kureha and Nakuru gave Konoe concerned voices.

“I’m fine, thanks.” Konoe answered, and put down her chopsticks.

However, she really looked like she was devoid of her usual energy. Eating only one bowl of rice in the morning is not normal for her. Normally she'd be a small glutton despite her body. Not to mention that she still hasn't answered my question from yesterday. Why did you not tell me the real goal of this trip? Even when I asked her this morning, she just avoided me...Hmm, something's weird.

"...Hey, Suzutsuki, the goal of this trip was to visit the grave of Konoe's mother, right?" I whispered towards Suzutsuki, who sat next to me.

She put down the rolled omelette she had between her chopsticks, and gently smiled.

"So you knew? Ah, you must have heard about it from Nagare, correct? Really, he doesn't understand a girl's feelings at all. Even though Subaru tried so hard to hide it from you."

"Huh? What do you mean?" I returned the question, to which Suzutsuki put her index finger on her lips.

"That's a secret."

"Huh?"

"I don't think it would be fair if I told you. Not to mention that it's her problem. Even I know when to be quiet." She explained with vague words.

What is this...Are you telling me to take care of it myself? That rich lady is as strict as always.

"The day of the death anniversary is tomorrow, so you still have time. Once we're done with breakfast today, we'll go back to the sea again, and there's the summer festival tonight. Do your best, Jirou-kun." Suzutsuki said, and drank up some soup with a dignified gesture.

Do your best, huh...

"...Even if you say that."

What can I even do about this?

♀ × ♂

Just as Suzutsuki said, we moved to the sea right after breakfast. Naturally that wouldn't end calmly either, and for some reason we started a boys vs girls beach volleyball match. The teams were Konoe and I versus Suzutsuki, Masamune, Nakuru, and Kureha. No chance to win that, both in numbers and talent alone. Eh? The old man? Nah, he's the judge. I genuinely feel bad for him now, seeing him left out like that.

Mid-way, Konoe was forced to drop out because she wasn't feeling well, and Takanashi Punyuru switched in. It seems like Suzutsuki really wanted her own butler to become a girl again. In the end, I was completely bashed since I was playing alone, but Konoe seemed to be having fun, so it was all alright in the end.

By the way, both Kureha and Nakuru had no doubts about Punyuru at all. Masamune let out a bothered 'How much does he like crossdressing...', getting somewhat of a shock. Eh? The old man? He was punched upon clinging to his daughter wearing a swimsuit. It took a solid two hours until he was freed from being tied up.

However, as before, Punyuru...No, Konoe would not answer my question. Because of what Suzutsuki told me, I tried to be reasonable with her, but the more I asked her, the less energy she seemed to have, which is why I was forced to give up. And, without being able to achieve anything, the horizon started to turn orange, and our beach trip ended.

Without much time to rest, the summer festival began. We planned to visit it since it was near the inn we were staying at, but...

"To think...they'd even prepare these yukata for us."

The festival area was lit up beneath the night sky. I was simply enjoying the sight in front of me, all the girls wearing beautiful yukatas we borrowed from the inn, customized to fit the summer festival theme.

“Ehehe, what do you think, Nii-san.” Kureha twirled on the spot, showing off her dashing pink yukata.

It seems like she was forced to wear a child’s size yukata in order for it to fit her. She doesn’t seem to mind since it’s cute though.

“Ugh, it’s a bit tight...” Nakuru said, while putting two hands on her chest.

In her case, it was too tight around her chest area, which made it problematic compared to Kureha’s but in a different way. Her yukata was a bright yellow color. I just hope she holds back on being a pervert tonight.

“Huh, this is a pretty big festival.” Masamune looked at the stalls in excitement.

She wore a purple yukata, fitting her the best out of everyone. At least if you disregard her going through her wallet, counting what should afford with ‘Shaved ice, crepe, sweet apples...’ and so on.

“Fufu, seems like things will get exciting.” Suzutsuki was as calm as always, as she gazed at the festival scenery. She wore a black yukata, fitting her hair, and also her body physique, emphasizing what was important. She really doesn’t feel like a high school student compared to Kureha.

“...Hmpf.” There grumbled Konoe in her glasses style, meaning she’s acting as Takanashi Punyuru.

She wore an orange yukata. Maybe she really enjoys cute yukata like this? And even so, she seems a bit lackluster in energy. Happiness fits her much better.

“Now, let’s go.”

As I was thinking that, Suzutsuki suddenly lined up next to me, and... Waaaah, why are you taking my hand so nonchalantly! Why are we holding hands!?

“What are you so surprised about? This is all to fix your gynophobia.”

“F-Fix...”

She’s planning on walking around the festival like this? I mean, it might help for sure, but isn’t that a bit too bold? Kureha and Nakuru are around as well, what if they get the wrong idea...

“H-Hey, what are you two doing!”

Together with a sharp voice, Usami Masamune forcefully broke between me and Suzutsuki.

“My, what’s wrong, Usami-san? Why are you panicking like this?” Suzutsuki just calmly responded.

“Wha...” Masamune swallowed her breath. “I-I’m not panicking at all! Why are you just holding the stupid chicken’s hand like that!?”

“Is it that weird? He is my fiancée after all.”

“Lies! You’re making up stuff again!” Masamune bit her lip.

Seeing this, Suzutsuki let out a sigh.

“Can’t be helped then, so let me teach you about the truth.”

“The truth?” Masamune returned the question, to which Suzutsuki started whispering.

“He suffers from gynophobia.”

“Wha...how do you know about that...”

“...Hmm, judging from that reaction, you knew. That just now is meant as treatment.”

“Treatment?”

“That’s right. I’m trying to fix his gynophobia by holding hands. Because of certain circumstances, I want to help with this problem.”

“...! Why would you...”

“I mean...I’m an honor student and a noble lady, right?”

“You say that yourself!?”

“Seeing how pathetic of a chicken he was, I just can’t ignore him.”

“Nonsense! You’re not that kind of a person!”

“But, it’s true that I want to help him. You should be able to tell.”

“Urk...Y-You’re right, but...” That nasty rabbit grit her teeth.

Konoe and the other two were completely entranced by the festival stalls, not realizing the small bout going on right now.

“That’s why there’s no problem if I were to hold Jirou-kun’s hand like this.” Suzutsuki once again reached for my hand.

However, with a fierce ‘N-No!’ Masamune grabbed her wrist, and would not let go, like she was glued to it.

“That hurts, Usami-san. You don’t need to grab my wrist like that. Also, I need to help fix Jirou-kun’s gynophobia, unlike you.”

“I-I have to do it as well! I have the duty of helping him fix that stupid problem!”

“...? Why is that?”

“B-Because...we promised! I said that I’d help with the stupid chicken’s gynophobia because we’re friends!”

“...Hmmm.”

For some reason Masamune started blushing while explaining herself, receiving a somewhat cold gaze from Suzutsuki.....Um, is this some battlefield? Why are they fighting for the right to fix my gynophobia? If you’re on bad terms, you don’t have to work so hard. And don’t wrap me up in this mess.

“Hey, Jirou-kun, how about we go to the target shooting?” Suzutsuki suddenly spoke out to me.

Her gaze was drifting towards a stall at the festival grounds. It was a

shooting range where you could win toys and the like.

“Would you like to join us, Usami-san?”

“Hm, sounds fine to me.”

The two headed towards that stall in a straight line...Hm? Why are they going together? Did they suddenly end up like good friends or something?

“This is a duel, Suzutsuki Kanade. We’re aiming for the big prize, alright.”

“Ahaha, what are you talking about? I’m not going to shoot at your head.”

“Fufu, right. Good for you, I might have had to defend myself otherwise.”

As they walked on ahead, Suzutsuki and Masamune smiled at each other. Oh crap, their relationship is getting even worse. We have a rich lady and a commoner, the rift between them is as profound as it could get. If I fall in there, I won’t be able to get out.

“Huh, so we just have to shoot with this, right.” Suzutsuki stuffed the cork into the gun, as she spoke up.

By the way, the prizes for this shooting fair were plush toys or sweets and the like. Honestly speaking, it’s nothing really worth aiming for.

“As long as the prize has fallen down, I will be able to get anything, I wonder.”

“...Anything...”

Masamune muttered something as she looked at the gun. Her gaze gently turned towards me. Eh, what? Why are you looking like a hunter aiming at a turkey...? And why are you pointing the muzzle towards me...

“Woah!?”

Together with a **Pop!** sound, something flew towards me.

“You nasty rabbit! What are you doing!?” I somehow managed to evade the cork, and complained loudly.

That was dangerous! It went right past my shoulder! That stuff hurts if you shoot me from close range!

“...Ah, sorry stupid chicken.”

“Don’t give me that! Why would you do that!?”

“Eh!? I-I mean...on a whim...”

“On a whim...!?”

Don’t joke with me. Since when did Japan turn into a gun-based society. Wait, is she threatening me right now? My life isn’t some prize, you know.

“A-Ahaha! It’s fine, I’ll aim properly next time.” Masamune tried to switch the topic, and pointed the gun at the actual prizes now.

In detail, she was aiming for a bear plush toy. That’s unexpectedly girly of her.

“...Phew.”

She must have been attempting to calm her mind, as she took a deep breath, and put her finger on the trigger—

“Usami-san.”

“Kya!?”

Together with a cute shriek, the bullet missed its target. I can’t blame her, Suzutsuki suddenly slapped both her hands on Masamune’s shoulders after all. What a distasteful prank.

“~~~! What are you doing!?”

“I’m sorry, I was just curious.”

“...About what?”

“If rabbit ears would grow out of your head.”

“Are you making fun of me!?” Masamune glared at Suzutsuki with blood-shot eyes, pointing the muzzle at her now.

Waaaah stop it you idiot! Don't point a gun at people! This isn't some Western drama. And yet, the old lady at the stall was all 'Aim for the head! Headshot!' for some reason. Why are you so excited?

“I'm sorry. As an apology, I'll get that plush toy for you.”

“Eh?”

As Masamune gave Suzutsuki a dubious gaze, she readied her gun, and got into position. Didn't expect her to pull it off that smoothly, despite being a rich lady. She's like a sniper part of the underground mafia.

“Then, here I go.” She calmly exclaimed, and together with another popping sound, the plush toy fell.

It sure did, but...

“Wha...! What are you doing!”

Hm? What are you talking about?” Suzutsuki seemed confused as she accepted the plush toy from the old lady.

However, what she received wasn't the bear plush toy Masamune had aimed for, but rather the rabbit plush toy next to it.

“Here, you wanted this right, Usami-san.”

“No! I wanted the bear next to it!”

“Eh? Really? I'm sorry, Usagi-san.”

“~~~! Y-You...!”

“What a shame, just when I went out of my way to kill it for you.”

“You didn’t kill it, you shot it down!”

“Alright, I’ll be taking this rabbit then. I found the perfect way to use it as well.”

“Use it?”

“As a punching bag.”

“What are you thinkiiiiiiing! Give me that!” Masamune screamed as she stole back the rabbit from Suzutsuki.

Yeah, I think things are better that way. This is like the cat from Crayon Sh*n-chan. Then again, I think that half of this was simply to tease Masamune.

“Alright, this means I take the lead in this contest.”

“Urk...!” Masamune grit her teeth with a ‘I’m not going to lose!’ and got into position again.

I think you’re just wasting energy and time, I doubt you can win against this rich lady anyway.

“Hey, Suzutsuki, why not give it a rest now?” I whispered in the direction of Suzutsuki so that Masamune couldn’t hear me.

I don’t want Masamune to start crying, you know.

“So you’re taking her side, Jirou-kun.”

“I didn’t say that. I’m just saying you should stop with the teasing, you already did what you set out to do, right?”

Their power relationship had already been established, so anymore needless fighting would just hurt the both of them.

“You’re wrong.”

However, Suzutsuki gave me an unexpected response.

“I told you before, I’m not good at dealing with this girl.”

“Not good...Even though you keep teasing her?”

“Indeed. Honestly speaking, Usami Masamune is my archnemesis. She’s the first person who ever saw through my lies and excuses.”

“Lies and excuses...”

Is she talking about her acting as the honor student at school?

“That’s why I can’t help but take her seriously. But, no matter what I do, she won’t back down, leaving me restless. She keeps facing me no matter how often I strike her down. Well, that’s also why I’m bad with her.” Suzutsuki muttered with a rarely fainthearted expression.

...Is she scared? Scared of Masamune, who can see through her nonsense? That would explain why she’s so desperate. All to hide her own fear.

“Yaho, Nii-san.”

As I was thinking about that, someone called out to me behind my back. Standing there were Kureha and Nakuru. Both of them seemed to be enjoying the festival in their own right, carrying sweets and other objects in their hands.

“Nya? A shooting range? Looks fun!” Kureha smiled innocently, and lined up next to Masamune.

Nakuru stood behind the two, observing the scenery. When I returned my gaze back to Suzutsuki, she held her normal expression again, like she always would at school.

“Jirou-kun, did you know? They planned a performance for today’s festival.”

“...A performance?”

“It’s a special event. It’s something like a beauty contest for women, as well as performance for men, which was suddenly decided.”

“For men...”

What event are we talking about? Some bodybuilding contest? Not really too confident in that.

“Fufu, it’s very interesting.” Nakuru must know the contents of the contest, as she let out a snicker. “...It’s a battle royale.”

“What?”

“It was supposed to stay a secret until the very start, but it’s a pretty large event from what Nakuru heard.” She sounded like she was bragging.

...What is this anxiety filling me? A battle royale? It definitely can’t be anything worthwhile. Maybe I should ask our guardian Old Fart for help...

“Oh yeah, where’s the old man?”

Haven’t seen him since we came here. Maybe he suffered a fatal mental wound at the beach today? After everything he went through, I wouldn’t blame him.

“Yeah, Nakuru had Subaru-sama’s father become a judge in the yukata beauty contest. He’s currently helping with preparations.”

“Huh!? How did that happen!?”

Also, she had him do that? How does she have the right to decide that?

“Well, when we talked about the contest, he asked Nakuru if he could participate. It was very sudden, but with a reward in mind, Nakuru agreed.”

“Reward...”

Something like a copy of one of Konoe’s videos as a child? I bet that the president of the Subaru-sama Fanclub must be willing to pay a fortune for that. Damn it, Subaru-sama when she was a child, I would have loved to see that for myself. Still, why as a judge...and why does Nakuru have the right to decide that...

“...Well, not like racking my brain about it will suddenly produce an answer.”

Since the contest will begin soon, I'll find out eventually. Still, it sure is lively with so many girls around. The mood is as diverse as pastel colors. All of them have their own knacks, but at least they're looking cute in their yukata. Makes sense that having four girls around is—

“...Hold on?”

Four? I counted the number of people around me. Sakamachi Kureha, Narumi Nakuru, Usami Masamune, Suzutsuki Kanade...So, where's Konoe Subaru?

♀ × ♂

“...Jirou? Why are you here?”

A few minutes away from the festival area, standing beneath the August night sky, filled with radiating stars, was Konoe Subaru in her girl mode, wearing a yukata. For some reason, she had taken off her glasses, going away from being Takanashi Punyuru.

“I heard from Suzutsuki, saying that you might be here.”

Well, she said ‘I'll tell you where she is, so treat me to some food at the stalls’, but that was an easy price to pay. After all, this problem is much more important than money.

“Come on, I came to pick you up. Let's walk around the festival together. Don't just stay here all the time.”

—At this graveyard, which was about the size of a small park. Konoe stood in front of a single grave, surrounded by loneliness. Seeing a Japanese yukata with a Western-themed graveyard just created this discomfort within me.

“...Is this your mother's grave?” Unable to bear with the silence, I spoke up.

“.....Yeah.” Konoe faintly nodded. “I just felt like coming here alone. Don't you think it's weird? Why would my mother be buried with the

Takanashi Family?”

“Well... I was curious.”

It was hard to ask after all, but I could somehow think of a reason. It was probably related to her family...

“—Elopement.”

“Wha?”

“It was an elopement. Mom and Dad...when they got married... apparently a lot happened, and Mom ran away...”

“...Really now.”

Wait, seriously? That old man ran away?

“I don’t know all the details, but...because of that, Mom is sleeping here.”

“.....”

So that’s why Konoe’s mother is resting here. Well, no clue what happened in the past, but there is nothing I can do even after knowing. There’s more important things to take care of as well. More precious things to care for.

“Konoe, why did you not tell me about the real goal of this trip. Does it...have something to do with me?” I asked the same question I had attempted all day.

Suzutsuki told me that this was a problem between me and Konoe. In the event that the reason she didn’t tell me, and the reason that she’s lacking energy today...is because I hurt her, then...

“N-No! You didn’t do anything wrong!” Konoe immediately denied my own thoughts.

And then, she fell silent. Despite it being midsummer, the air at this graveyard felt cold, and the silence was painful. I wonder how long this continued. Finally, Konoe slowly opened her mouth, like she had

made up her mind.

“...I didn’t want to come here with you, Jirou.” She declared.

“You didn’t want to come here with me...”

“D-Don’t get the wrong idea! It’s not that I hate you or anything like that!” Konoe desperately tried to explain herself. “I thought that if I came here with you...I would definitely start crying again.”

“.....”

“...Before Mom died, she was really worried about me. Worried if I could make friends at school. But, just as she was worried about, I was unable to make friends because of my attitude, and because of my fear of getting too close to people.”

“...But that’s...”

That’s nothing you could just change. She’s been hiding the fact that she was a girl at school all this time, and was scared of having someone find out that secret, which is why she never got too close to others. That’s why she was unable to make any friends.

“But, with Jirou, I finally made a friend at school. Not to mention that thanks to you, I managed to make up with the young lady. That made me...really happy.”

“Happy...”

So...why do you look like you’re about to cry?

“But, I thought about it. If I came here with you, I’d probably start crying again. Even though I don’t want to cry in front of Mom, I won’t be able to stop myself...Because...I’d be reminded of Mom again.” Konoe said, trying to hold back the tears. “I-It’s always my fault, because I can’t forget about her, because I can’t get over it... Just when I finally made a friend, I can’t even have Mom meet you... and just thinking about that...”

“.....”

“I-I really wanted to introduce Jirou to Mom. Brag about you, how I made a friend. But, when I think about how I can’t do that...when I realize I can’t even introduce the one friend I made...”

“...Konoe, that’s enough.”

“W-Why did she have to die? Why was I unable to do anything? I couldn’t even introduce my first friend...Why did she pass away? All these thoughts fill my head, and even though I know I shouldn’t, I can’t stop the tears...!” There, Konoe grew silent.

She must have been surprised. After all—I suddenly embraced her.

“J-Jirou!?”

“Sorry, I just...couldn’t keep watching you like that.” I answered, while hugging her delicate body.

I know I was being forceful. However, I couldn’t come up with any words to cheer up Konoe. I figured that if she was going through such a rough time, it would be best if she had someone with her. Even if it’s just warmth like this. Thinking about it, ever since I met her, Konoe’s been crying a lot. It happened at least three times in April alone. Each time I think to myself that I don’t want to make her cry, she ends up doing so anyway, and I only make her cry more.

What about that ‘I won’t make her cry anymore’ nonsense. In the end, I’m an all-talk chicken bastard. That’s why, at least for today, I want her tears to stop, as the friend I am.

“I-Idiot! Get away! If you keep this close to me, you will...!”

“I know that. Calm down.”

I knew this would happen. I felt goosebumps on my body, and because I was tightly embracing Konoe, red liquid dripped down from my nose, the blood loss making me feel dizzy—It’s my gynophobia activating. I knew this would happen when I hug a girl. But...

“...So what.”

No matter how weak I may be, no matter how much of a chicken bastard I may be, collapsing by simply hugging a girl. Even I can hold my ground at times. Especially when my friend is sad like this, I need to become more reliable. That's the least I can do—as friends.

“Urk...!”

My symptoms are getting worse. My consciousness is about to fade out. But, not yet. I can't collapse just yet. The promise I shared with my old man—Stand By Me—I'll protect you, so stay with me, Konoe. I'll become strong enough so you can say these words to me. That's why...

“_____”

I don't know how much time passed. The graveyard was filled with silence as before. But, Konoe's weeping stopped.

“...Enough. I'm okay now.” Konoe said so, and forcefully pushed me away.

“Y-Yeah. Sorry to suddenly do this.” I apologized with a faint voice.

However, Konoe just looked at me...

“No, it's fine. Thanks to you, I'm feeling better now, Jirou.” She smiled.

As if this was enough to erase all tension inside of me, my body collapsed, having crossed my limit long ago. My consciousness started to distance itself from me. Even so, my body did not collapse.

“...Thank you, Jirou.” The dear butler supported my body, and whispered into my ear. “You really are my—”

Her words sounded warm, and reassuring. Maybe they were a declaration for her mother, who was sleeping here. However, before I could hear them until the very end, my consciousness cut out, and I fell asleep inside Konoe's chest.



Chapter 5: Summer Festival

Battle Royale

This might be a bit abrupt, but I feel like recently, I've been passing out a lot. At the very least, during my life so far, I would only pass out at home, but that has changed drastically as of late. Of course, there is one reason for that. I got in contact with those guys.

"Morning, Nii-san. Awake again?"

"...Yo, Kureha."

When I opened my eyes, Kureha's large eyes were gazing down at me. I raised up my body, and confirmed my surroundings. It seems like I was resting beneath a tent standing on the festival grounds.

"I was shocked to find Punyuru-chan carrying you along, Nii-san! You hit your head, right? You really are clumsy, Nii-san."

"...Yeah, you're right."

Me hitting my head—was probably a lie of Konoe. She was probably trying to be conscious of me. It'd be troublesome if they found out I collapsed after hugging her for too long. But, that's just fine. After all, Konoe stopped crying. Thinking about it, I always look pathetic in front of her, especially when she cries.

Back in April, I lost consciousness because of a nosebleed, in May I was hit by a car and was hospitalized, in June I knew that she was crying over the school broadcast, and now this...that's why I'm glad. This time, I was there for her right when it happened.

Still, I kept up a good fight, I think. Or maybe Suzutsuki and Masamune's treatment worked. I feel like I'm slowly but steadily conquering my gynophobia.

"Kureha, what time is it right now?"

“9pm. The festival started for good now. There will be fireworks after the show.”

“Show?”

Is that what Nakuru talked about?

“Yeah, I think the yukata beauty contest is in the final stages. They’ll decide the winner soon. Everyone else is checking it out besides me.”

“Huh. So that other battle royale will start soon?”

“Yeah, the ‘We will have you kill each other’ type.”

“...Is that going to end up fine?”

That smells like danger like none other if you ask me. That’s like an actual battle royale.

“Apparently safety is guaranteed. It’s like a survival game, shooting each other with paint guns, and the one who survives will get a prize.”

“...Huh.”

Wait, this isn’t the time to stay calm. That sounds terrible. Why are you holding a battle royale at a festival?

“Well, the sponsor of that activity is NaruNaru’s family after all.”

“Huh?”

“Hm? You didn’t know? NaruNaru’s family is a pretty famous toy manufacturer. One of their famous inventions is the Silent Sheep. By the way, the prize of this battle royale is a giant Silent Sheep plush toy.”

Ahhh, I heard about that during the school festival. Apparently she’s the oldest daughter of that company president, as well as the class president of Kureha’s class. Unlike Suzutsuki, she really doesn’t feel like a rich lady though. Not to mention that her family basically holds rights over the Silent Sheep. I’ve seen advertisements on TV

about it, and it's been going on as a trend lately. I think the ad was about the sheep walking on two feet, beating up some American mouse or something, screaming 'I am Japan's Silent Sheep!'. It was too much, I stopped watching mid-way.

"But, why would she create such a plan?"

"Um...she said 'Now I can draw some actual gun action!', I think."

"So it was all to collect data again!"

"Apparently Nii-san is the protagonist for some new hard action work. She asked her parents because she was running out of time. Adding a fake goal like using this as PR."

That damn glasses junkie. Despite being some rich daughter, she's using her wealth for her own benefit like this. Such wasted capital.

"But but, there's lots of participants. You get lots of prizes too."

"Money and some giant Silent Sheep plush toy, right?"

"Nope, not just that."

"Not just that?"

"Apparently the winner of the battle royale will get another event—namely a kiss from the winner of the yukata beauty contest."

"A kiss, huh."

So it's a battle for the maiden's lips, I see. I don't care about the plush toy at all, and I'm sure most participants are aiming for money. But, Silent Sheep, huh.

"...Guess I should participate as well." I muttered.

"Hmm? Why? Are you a Silent Sheep fan as well?"

"No, not really..."

I really have no interest in that grotesque sheep, but...the same can't be said about Konoe Subaru. She absolutely adores that Silent Sheep.

Basically, I can make this a present. With what happened just now, it might be a bit awkward, but if I can give her the plush toy as a present, she'll surely show me a blooming smile again.

"Nyahaha, that means we're rivals then."

"Wait, are you participating as well?"

"Yup, I'll be there as well. Don't care about the money or the kiss, but that plush toy looks interesting. No rules say that only guys can participate as well."

"Oh yeah, you were a fan of that sheep as well, right."

Unlike before, she got really into it at the school festival, or something like that. Thanks to that, more and more Silent Sheep appeared at home. For me, it feels like I'm living in a horror house.

"Also, Usamin-senpai said she's in as well."

"I guess she's aiming for the money."

"Yeah, she said 'With this, I won't have to worry about eating bread with mayo for a while'."

She's as poor as always, huh. Still, I have a lot of rivals, I see. It feels like this will be a lot about close combat.

"...Hm?"

Oh yeah, did some of them participate in the yukata beauty contest as well? Since they offered prize money, I bet Masamune was there.

"Hey, what about the beauty contest? Did the others participate?"

"...Yeah. Usamin-senpai did, and everybody else was thinking of joining as well, but..." Kureha suddenly grew silent.

...? I wonder, was there some reason that didn't allow them to participate?

"Huh? You're awake, stupid chicken?"

Right as I was thinking that, Masamune walked into the tent. Suzutsuki and Nakuru were with her.

“Usamin-senpai, how did things end?”

“Well...about what you expected.”

“I figured.”

“Nakuru too...She didn’t think this would happen.”

“Well, with Nagare as the judge, this result was written in stone. I didn’t really feel like fighting a lost battle.”

The girls group was discussing things between themselves. Huh? Oh yeah, where’s Konoe? She came back from the graveyard, right?

“Are you searching for that girl, Jirou-kun?” Suzutsuki must have guessed what I was thinking, as she beckoned me over with a ‘If you want to know, then come with me’.

Eh, over there? Isn’t that where the beauty contest happened... Standing on top of that stage in the middle of the festival was a beauty wearing a yukata, a paper with a number on her chest. And, she had a sash on her, saying ‘Yukata Queen’...Wait a second.

“...The heck is this?” I muttered in the face of this odd scenery.

Standing there was none other than Takanashi Punyuru. Unbeknownst to everyone, Subaru-sama herself became the yukata queen.

♀ × ♂

According to Suzutsuki’s explanation, Konoe was forced to participate in the contest because of the old man being a judge...or rather, Takanashi Punyuru was. And, she also achieved an overwhelming victory, since the old man would not let the other judges disagree with his vote. I’m sure he just wanted to show how adorable his own daughter is. Or maybe he just wanted a kiss from his own daughter. I could see this being his motivation.

Either way, that's how the contest ended, and the battle royale would begin, with a kiss from Konoe on the line...

"You guys are seriously planning to participate?"

We stood in the temple grounds near the festival area. This apparently was turned into the battle royale grounds, and with the paint gun in my hand, I asked the others. Kureha and Masamune made sense, they're in it for the stuffed toy, and the money. Their motives are clear. But...

"Isn't that obvious?" Nakuru puffed out her chest, caressing her paint gun.

To think the person who set up this whole event would participate. Well, she sure is getting close to collecting that data. By the way, the rules of the game are simple. If you get hit with a single shot from the paintball gun, you're out.

"Nakuru...won't accept this."

"Huh?"

"If Senpai were to win, you would get a kiss from Punyuru-chan, right? Nakuru cannot allow that to happen. Senpai is part of Nakuru's favorite BL ship. You're not allowed to have any development with someone but Subaru-sama!"

"....."

...I'll kill her. She's my target number one on the hit list. She caused all of this to happen.

"Fufu, why not? I want to have fun myself." A girl with her twintails readied her gun—Suzutsuki Kanade.

"Why are you even participating?"

What meaning is there for her to win? She's rich, she doesn't need the money, and she's not necessarily a fan of that sheep either. Yet, she's participating in an event like this to...create memories?

“It’s the first time I participated in a game like this, so I’m looking forward to it. Not to mention...”

“Not to mention...what?”

“...Well, let’s just say that my reason might be fairly similar to Nakuru-chan.”

“...?”

Is this the pattern where she doesn’t want me to win because of the potential kiss with Konoe? I mean, it would make sense. Suzutsuki is Konoe’s master, so she probably dislikes the idea of her butler’s kiss being made into a prize. She really loves spoiling her butler after all. If someone’s going to take it, she probably wants it for herself.

There’s several other men ready here, aiming for the prize money and kiss from Konoe. Since the battlegrounds are the entire temple grounds, you have a lot of space to run away. By the way, Konoe is located in the corner of the temple, watching over this. Can’t have the prize participate after all. However, most problematic of all.

“Kiss kiss kiss kiss kiss kill kill kill kill kill...” There was a certain butler muttering curses as he glared at his paintball gun—Konoe Nagare.

I guess he really is out for the kiss from his own daughter. But, his presence is different from any of the other guys. I feel like he might take out a machine gun instead of a paintball gun.

“...Well, forget about that.”

I definitely can’t lose this. I want to win the plush toy so I can give it to Konoe as a present, but letting any of these bastards snatch a kiss from Konoe...really pisses me off for some reason. I mean, it’s not like I desperately want her to kiss me or anything.

‘To all participants, I hope you have prepared yourself. The event is about to begin, so please scatter across the temple grounds.’

An employee’s voice reached my ears from a nearby speaker. From what I heard, there’s cameras all over the place, so the audience back

at the festival can observe the happenings here. Alright, better get moving and come up with a plan...

“Stupid chicken, give me a second.”

Right there, someone pulled on my sleeve. This sharp voice could only belong to Usami Masamune. She took me to the shadow of the offering box of the shrine.

“What do you want? The event is about to start.”

“Needed to talk with you about something.” Masamune took a deep breath, and continued. “Won’t you team up with me?”

At the same time, I heard ‘The game starts now’ coming from the speakers again...No no no, what is she talking about?

“It’s not that bad of an idea, right? We can split up the prize and prize money.”

“Team up...Is there really a need to go that far?”

I mean, the participants of this event are pretty strong, so teaming up would raise our chance of victory, but to think that this nasty rabbit of all people would bring that up...

“You stupid chicken, do you really not get it? If you fight normally, you have practically no chance of winning. After all, **she** is participating.”

“She?”

“Come on, the first-year of the handicrafts club you know all too well.”

“...Ahh.”

She’s talking about Kureha, I see.

“Did you not hear from her? She ranked higher than me in the handicrafts club internal ranking.”

“By the way, what rank were you?”

“5th. Pretty much in the middle. That’s why it shouldn’t sound that bad for you, right? I definitely can’t afford to lose here.”

“Why?”

“Urk...M-My personal reason! Hurry up and decide! Also, if we win, I get the money and the kiss, you can have the plush toy.”

“...Alright.”

The goal of this mission is to win the plush toy, and it wouldn’t hurt to have Konoe kiss another girl. I bet it’s just a kiss on the cheek anyway.

“Really? ...Thank god.”

For some reason, Masamune was oddly relieved at my agreement. The problem is, how can we even defeat Kureha. And can’t forget about the other rivals as well...

“—Found youuuuuu.”

Hearing that ominous voice, my body shook in fear. When I turned my gaze towards that voice, standing there was a single girl—Sakamachi Kureha. She was in her familiar yukata appearance, and smiled.

“Nya? You’re together with Usamin-senpai. What evil deeds are you two up to?”

“K-Kureha...”

This is the worst. To think the last boss would appear in the first round. No battle even started yet. For now...maybe I should buy us some time?

“Y-Yo, Kureha. So you’re still alive.”

“Yup. Then again, it just started. But, what would you like? Fight me? I don’t mind if you make it 2v1. Something similar happened

just now already.”

“Something similar?”

“Yup, it was a 10v1.”

“That’s not similar at all!”

“Well, the second the battle began, the guys around me were all ‘Young girl, how about you come play with us in the thicket over there?’, and closed in on me.”

“They’re all perverts! Call the police!”

“Since I was pretty grossed out, I beat three of them, and the rest ran away, retiring from the game.”

“.....”

...Scary. My little sister is on an entirely different level. To think she’d immediately defeat several of our rivals like that...

“Let’s play together, Nii-san~” Kureha played with the paintball gun in her hand, slowly approaching us.

...What should we do about this? I put my finger on the trigger. Leaving aside the usual wrestling training we’re doing, now we’re both fighting for survival. If so, I should have a chance as well...

“—Perfect timing.” Surprisingly enough, Masamune was smiling to herself. “Hey, Sakamachi, how about you team up with us?”

“Nya? Team up...with Usamin-senpai and Nii-san?”

“Yup. All so that we can defeat **her**. You know how troublesome she is, right?”

“Yeah, it doesn’t sound half bad...”

Masamune and Kureha were discussing something...Eh? What is this about? I thought our goal was to group up and defeat Kureha? Not to mention, who is Masamune talking about if not Kureha?

“—So this is where you were, Senpai.”

There, I heard a familiar and mature voice. Standing there was a girl wearing glasses and cat ears—Narumi Nakuru. With an atmosphere different from usual, she slowly approached us.

“...Stupid chicken, you better be careful.” Masamune commented, as she readied her gun and got into a fighting position.

I could see some faint sweat on her cheeks. She must be nervous too, because her lips were quivering ever so slightly.

“H-Hey, were you talking about her...?” My tongue wouldn’t work fully.

Masamune faintly nodded, and explained with a serious expression.

“Listen carefully. During this spring’s handicrafts club internal ranking, Nakuru placed—2nd. She’s stronger than your younger sister.”

♀ × ♂

“No no no, you’re joking.” I immediately put in a retort.

That’s impossible. After all, she never fights back when I slap her or flick her on the forehead. She seems weak, alright.

“Also, didn’t you say that the third-years were amazing during that ranking match?”

“Yeah, the two third-years—namely the vice-captain and the club president were on a different level, but the club president gave up mid-way, which is why they landed last.”

“...Huh.”

But, her ending up in second is...

“Fufu, you seem a bit dubious, Senpai. Then, why doesn’t Nakuru show you? She didn’t want to use this, but this situation would not allow her to do otherwise.” Nakuru flashed an invincible smile, and

took out something from her pocket.

That's...a can of coke? Nakuru opened it, and gushed its contents down her throat. Didn't she say she disliked drinks with carbohydrates? But, what is this...I feel like something bad is about to happen...

"...Mm...Puwah, Nakuru gulped it all down." Nakuru let out an eerie 'Ehehe' laugh, seemingly satisfied. "Fufu, you can't do this, Senpaiiii. You're only allowed to kiss Subaru-sama, and nobody elseeee." Her way of speaking seemed more listless than before.

...Something's off. Her cheeks turned faintly red, and it seemed like her legs were staggering as she walked on ahead. Her eyes were practically wandering all over the place, and her yukata had slowly started to become undone. This is almost like...

"...Hey, is she—drunk?" I asked Masamune.

"...Yeah. It sometimes happens in manga, right? She actually ends up intoxicated when drinking carbonated stuff."

"C-Carbonated..."

Seriously? Not even alcohol? But, that doesn't make sense. She looks even weaker now compared to before.

"Ehehe, so then...It's showtime~"

"!"

I regretted letting down my guard for a split second. In only a few steps, she immediately closed the distance between us. She formed a fist, pointing it towards me.

"...!?"

It slammed right into my defenseless abdomen. However, it was a light attack. It didn't hurt nearly as much as I expected.

"Urk..."

However, Nakuru was still staggering left and right, making it hard to estimate her next movement. Her changing courses were unpredictable.

“Is this...a drunken fist?”

The Drunken Monkey. The more drunk you get, the stronger you become. Of course, this was supposed to be pure fiction and only working in movies, but to think someone existed who perfected this. Not to mention with mere coke. However...

“What about that?”

Even if my attacks don't hit, no matter how tricky of a movement you might have...if your attacks are this weak, there's no meaning to any drunken fist.

“Huh? You still haven't realized, Senpai?”

Even so, Nakuru's smile looked as invincible as before. And, she declared.

“Your belt is broken.”

“...Wha?”

In shock, I looked down at my belt, and...wah, she's right. The buckle's all messed up. Not good, I was about to reveal my private underwear...

“...Hold on a damn second.”

How did she know about my belt being messed up?

“...Talking about it in RPG terms, you'd call this a forced armament release.” Masamune gave a comment.

“A-Armament release?”

“Yeah, that's Nakuru's special skill. Basically, she strips the enemy off their clothes. Taking their buttons, undoing their clothes, just like she destroyed your belt.”

“U-Undoing my clothes...”

“It seems like as soon as she’s this drunk, she gets off on stripping people of their clothes. That’s how she ticks. But think about it. Can you keep fighting if you end up naked in a public place like this?”

“Wha...”

“You can’t, right. You’d have to hide yourself...and other things.” Masamune must have been reminded of a past trauma, as she started shaking in her boots.

.....So the reason Nakuru ended up in second...is because she stripped the clothes off both of Masamune and Kureha, which then landed her that high in the ranking?

“—It’s the undressing drunken fist.” Kureha muttered with a pale face. “Everyone in the club calls NaruNaru like that. Getting to perfect it that far is getting close to talent. Not to mention that the person in question doesn’t even remember what she did. That’s why NaruNaru dislikes using this technique.”

“Undressing...drunken fist...”

...Crap, I might actually wanna learn that.

“For now, you have to step back, Nii-san!” Kureha stepped in front of us.

“Aha, so first it’s Kureha-chan, I see.” Nakuru’s cat ears shook, as she licked her tongue.

However...

“Let me in as well!” Masamune used that opening to step ahead herself.

It was a two versus one. A battle of the 2nd rank versus the 3rd and 5th rank. Each of them were raring to go, the paintball gun stuffed in their sashes. That’s the Rouran Academy handicrafts club for you, even at times like these they’re going close-distance.

“Don’t underestimate me, Nakuru. It won’t go the same way as it did during this spring’s ranking match.”

“Yeah, we need to repay you for how we ended up last time, NaruNaru.”

“Urk...You’re so weak without your coke, and you always lost against me in middle school too...If only you weren’t so dead set on stripping people of their clothes...”

“Fufu. No matter what you do, the results will be the same!”

Out of a staggering movement, Nakuru suddenly accelerated. She seemed to have made Masamune her target, closing the distance between them in an instant.

“Y-You! Who’d be willing to have their clothes taken off!”

The first one to act was Masamune with a sharp kick, aiming directly at Nakuru—

“That won’t do!” With swift movement and change of trajectory, Nakuru easily evaded this attack, and continued...

“...!?”

Receiving an attack directly to her chest, Masamune staggered backwards. The Undressing Drunken Fist—had acted.

“...Wait?”

I don’t see any change in Masamune’s clothing. Is that just my imagination?

“~~~! N-Nakuru, you...!” Masamune started blushing, and embraced her chest.

She glared at Nakuru, who...Wait hold on. That purple object in her hand...

“Fufu, what a feminine taste you have, Usami-senpai.”

Nakuru closely inspected the object of women's underwear in her hand—namely a bra, and started grinning to herself. Don't tell me... she stole that in one attack!?

“A-Amazing...”

Please, teach me how to do that! Rather than some drunken fist, this is magic!

“Grrr...Hurry up and give it back!” Masamune blushed furiously, and took her distance.

However, that didn't help much.

“...Ah, Usami-senpai, your yukata was moved, and I can see the front.”

“Wha...!?” Reflexively, Masamune looked down at her yukata.

Nakuru didn't miss that opening, wrapped around Masamune's back, and landed a chop on her sash. Immediately after, the yukata opened up more.

“Kya...Stop...!” Masamune desperately tried to hold up the yukata, desperately embracing it.

Thanks to that, only her shoulders and a bit of her chest were revealed. However, she won't be able to keep fighting with this. Thus, Usami Masamune—retired.

“Nyahaha! Nice assist, Usamin-senpai!” Kureha used this as an opening to move behind Nakuru's back, tackling her.

Her slender arms wrapped around Nakuru's waist—and captured her.

“For now, you drop out of the game, Usamin-senpai, and fix your yukata. I can take care of the rest.”

“Y-Yeah, thanks.”

Masamune pressed down her yukata, and ran away. Maybe she might be asking for help from Konoe for all I know. This only leaves...

“Now, what are you going to do, NaruNaru? When it comes to pure fighting strength, you can’t bear me.” Kureha tightly squeezed Nakuru’s body, not allowing her any way of escaping.

It was a bear hug. Normally, you’d do this from the front, to try and crush the back bones and chest bones, but with how much strength Kureha had, this didn’t matter. Nakuru let out a groan, as her face was distorted in pain.

“Nyahaha, not done yet!” Kureha was carefully lifting up Nakuru’s body.

I was looking at a german suplex, an immediate flip with Nakuru’s body about to crush into the ground—

“Funya?!”

Right before that, Kureha lost balance, and fell to the side...What happened? I can’t imagine Kureha making such a mistake. Was that... Nakuru’s doing? But, being grabbed from behind like that...

“Hehe, now it’s Nakuru’s turn!” Nakuru broke free from Kureha’s mess-up, and hopped onto her small body.

Right after—

“Nyahahahaha!” Kureha started laughing out loud.

At the same time, her yukata became undone, and Nakuru played around with her soft-looking skin.

“D-Don’t tell me!”

Tickling! I think she used her long arms during that suplex to tickle Kureha’s body. Oh yeah...she’s pretty weak to that.

“Wah, stop, no more, nyahaha!”

“Hmm, you’re so sensitive. Here, tickle tickle tickle.”

“Ahahahahaha, seriously, please, stop!”

“Ehehe, you’re so cute, Kureha-chan!”

“Nyahaha, no more...please...nya...Nyaaaaaaa!”



With her yukata revealing almost everything, Kureha stopped moving. She must have reached her limit, and passed out. Nakuru moved away, pointed her paintball gun at Kureha, and finished her.

“...!”

How could this happen. Sakamachi Kureha—retired as well.

“Now then, the last one is Senpai, right?” She announced, and walked towards me with staggering feet.

Because of that battle just now, the yukata was moved, revealing her shoulders and bare skin. Not to mention that her cleavage was wide open...Wait, this isn't the time to get excited about that!

“Don't even bother resisting. Nakuru will leave your glasses on at least. Completely naked, but with glasses. Nakuru is quite...interested in your body after all!”

“~~~!”

I felt shivers all over my body. Narumi Nakuru walked towards me, severely breathing. S-She'll strip me naked...! Don't joke with me, I don't want to end up naked in a public place like this. Also, I can't afford to lose. I need to give Konoe that plush toy as a present. I need her to cheer up. For that, no matter what method I have to use, I need to get out of this pinch. Even if that meant forming a pact with a certain devil...

“Having trouble, Jirou-kun?”

Suddenly, I heard a dignified voice. Turning around, there stood a rich lady with her trademark black-haired twintails—Suzutsuki Kanade. Seeing me crawl on the ground, she flashed a devilish smile.

♀ × ♂

“Oh, if it isn't Suzutsuki-senpai. Did you come here to get a good glimpse as well?” Nakuru nonchalantly spoke out to Suzutsuki.

“Yes, I've been watching for a while. It seems like we're the only people left.” Suzutsuki flashed a calm smile, and approached me, whispering into my ear. “Jirou-kun, leave this to me.”

“...Do you have a plan?”

We exchanged a few quiet words. However, we're talking about Narumi Nakuru, so even Suzutsuki shouldn't have it easy to deal with her...

"It's fine, just stay still."

"?"

Right when I wanted to ask her 'What do you mean', Nakuru moved. With high speed, she readied her Undressing Drunken Fist. Her fist aimed for a clean hit directly on Suzutsuki's yukata.

"—Don't move."

With this sudden demand, Nakuru stopped in her tracks, staring at Suzutsuki in disbelief. Even through her glasses, I could see how her gaze was directed at the object in Suzutsuki's hands.

"...! Y-You coward! How dare you take a hostage!"

"Fufu, really now? I don't particularly care what happens to them, though?"

"N-No way, not even thinking of them as human! Senpai, say something as well!"

"...What exactly am I supposed to say about this?"

In fact, the hostage Nakuru was talking about—were my glasses. Suzutsuki suddenly stole them from me, playing around with them between her fingers.

"How cruel! They bear no guilt in this situation!" Nakuru panicked at seeing my glasses in grave danger.

Wow...she actually looks like she's going to cry. That's a glasses junkie for you. Sometimes she acts completely outside of anything I could imagine. Or is this because she's intoxicated?

"Senpai! Why are you so calm! Your glasses have been taken hostage, you know!?"

“Even if you say that...”

“Are you not worried about Danny!?”

“Danny!? Who’s that!?”

“The person who has been taken hostage!”

“You gave my glasses a name!?”

Scaryyyyy! What kind of perverted roleplay is that!? Also, Danny!? My glasses are a guy!? First time I heard of that!

“Now, what are you going to do, Nakuru-chan? If you were to surrender now, these glasses...Danny-kun will be free, you know?”

“Urk...B-But...”

“Jirou-kun, are these glasses shape memory alloy? They bend very easily.”

“Ahhhhhhhhhhh please stoooooooooooooooooooooop!!” Nakuru’s face grew pale, as she screamed.

Then, silence filled the temple grounds. A few moments passed of her worrying about the hostage, only for the girl to speak up, seemingly determined herself.

“N-Nakuru understands. She surrenders.” Nakuru calmed down, and threw the paintball gun at Suzutsuki’s feet, getting on the ground.

Thus, Narumi Nakuru retired.

“Fufu, thank you, Nakuru-chan. Rest assured, I plan to keep my promise.”

“Y-Yes, please free Danny-kun...” Nakuru begged.

Suzutsuki flashed the smile of an angel, and...

“—I’m sorry, I was lying.”

Crack, an eerie sound rang out, and the frame of my glasses was split

in two.

“...That’s cruel, alright.”

Devil Suzutsuki really is a sadist. Even though Nakuru agreed to her conditions, she killed the hostage nonetheless. No remorse whatsoever even. Unfortunately enough, she threw the two pieces of my glasses into the nearby pond.

“Ahhhh! Dannyyyyyy!”

With no hesitation, Nakuru jumped after Danny—No, my glasses. She dove directly into the pond. It felt like she screamed ‘Dive EX!’ before doing so, but apparently the pond isn’t that deep. She hit her head on the way in, and stopped moving all-together. D-Did she die...?

“She’s fine.” Suzutsuki apparently guessed what I was thinking, and let out a sigh. “The employees are watching us, so I’m sure help will arrive soon. They surely don’t want any casualties here.”

“R-Really now.”

That is a bit reassuring to know. But, I just hope she at least stays over there. That glasses junkie is definitely the MVP of the match. I don’t ever want to fight her again.

“Also, how dare you just break my glasses like that.”

Although it was necessary to win, how could you do that? I hope you get possessed by some evil spirit.

“No worries.” Suzutsuki said, and offered me an object.

Wait, these are my glasses?

“The ones I broke just now were just a dummy. I exchanged them without her noticing.”

“Dummy...Why do you have that?”

“A countermeasure for Nakuru-chan, of course. During a fanclub meeting in April, she went and drank something carbonated. Ever

since then, I keep a pair with me, and as it turns out, it really helped now.”

“.....”

Just how well-prepared is she? Not to mention that it was a perfect dummy of my own glasses. Well, that’s how we made it through this dire situation, so I can’t complain.

“More importantly, there’s something more crucial to worry about, right.”

“Something more crucial?”

“Nagare.” Suzutsuki muttered.

What, so he’s still alive? So I guess it’s just us three now.

“Hey, Jirou-kun, let’s group up. Nagare is strong, we can’t beat him otherwise.”

“Hm...”

She’s not wrong. We’re talking about that helicopter parent. With a competition that put a kiss of his daughter on the line, he would use whatever method to win. I looked away, and observed our surroundings. He might be hiding somewhere. Even with my glasses, I can’t see too well during this night.

“Damn it...”

I turned my back towards Suzutsuki, looking around further, when—

“Jirou-kun, you really are naive.”

I heard these words behind my back. I turned around, but it was too late.

“...!? Y-You wench!”

I felt something soft pressing against my back. Suzutsuki suddenly clung to me.

“I’m sorry, what I just said was nonsense.”

“Wha...so the old man...”

“I took care of him right away.”

“What...?”

“It’s simple. I’m the master, and he’s my butler. He can’t go against his master. That’s why I ordered him to shoot himself. I felt a bit guilty though.”

“...!”

I should have realized. There’s no way she could deal with the old man this easily. But, guilt...That’s rare of her. I guess even this rich lady has a human heart?

“Of course, I gave him the order. ‘Le*ouch Vi Britannia orders you! Die!’, you know.”

“You seem to be having a lot of fun, oi!”

“Nagare joined in as well, screaming ‘Yes, your Highness!’, you know.”

“Why does the old man know that!?”

“Ordering people can be quite exhausting, you know.”

“You feel absolutely no guilt, right!?”

I wanted to retort with ‘The only ones who shoot are those prepared to be shot!’, but this isn’t the time for that. Judging from what she said, it’s only me and her left. Going from that, her goal must be...!

“Urk...!”

I felt a hot sensation gather around my nose, together with goosebumps all over my body, and faint dizziness. No doubt about it, my gynophobia is activating.

“Just give up like Nakuru-chan. You don’t want to pass out, right?”

“W-Who would do that...!”

“...I see, then you leave me no other choice.”

“...!”

The soft sensation hitting my back grew even more intense. Because of that, blood came gushing out of my nose. With my gynophobia activating, my consciousness was slowly starting to drift away. Standing was all it took. Although it's not direct contact, if she hugs me that strongly, it's only a matter of time. However...

“...I-I won't lose.”

This time, I can't go down like a chicken bastard. I'll win, and get Konoe that plush toy...

“You really are working hard today. Normally you'd be out right away.”

“H-Haha, maybe your treatment program is showing results by now?”

“That would be quite troublesome. However, don't get the wrong idea. Making you pass out isn't the only way I can win this contest.”

“!?”

I was suddenly freed, and pushed aside. I couldn't put enough strength in my legs, and collapsed to the ground. I tried to quickly push up my body, but...

“This marks the end. I didn't want to use such a forceful method, okay. But, you wouldn't stay low.” Suzutsuki explained with a cold voice, and pointed the muzzle of her paintball gun at my forehead.



“...Shit.”

So this is what she was aiming for. As soon as I get hit once, I’m out...

“At the very end, let me be honest with you.” Suzutsuki showed a different expression compared to usual, and slowly put the finger on the trigger. “Just now, when you were trying your hardest to win the

game despite being a chicken bastard...you were a bit cool. But...I cannot afford to let you win this game.”

Together with these words, my view turned red.

Chapter 6: And then, the Girl—

Feeling a faint warmth at the back of my head, I opened my eyes.

“Ah, you’re awake, Jirou?”

I blinked a few times, and found a familiar face looking down at me. It was Konoe Subaru. Oh right, it’s Takanashi Punyuru now. She seemed relieved to see me awake.

“...Where am I?”

It seems like my body was being put to rest. I felt a soft sensation at the back of my head, and with Konoe’s face this close—Wait a second, is she giving me a lap pillow?

“D-Don’t get the wrong idea! You just wouldn’t get up, so I wanted you to at least have a proper rest! There’s no weird meaning to this! I wasn’t enjoying your sleeping face at all!” Subaru-sama screamed, and forcefully pushed me off.

What do you mean...Was I sleeping? Why? I’m missing some memories...I feel like I got shot by Suzutsuki, and then...

“You were shot by the young lady, and then passed out. Once the tension of the contest left your body, you probably couldn’t keep it up any longer. That’s why I had you rest on this bench here.” Konoe gave an embarrassing explanation.

...The heck is up with that. How pathetic am I? On top of not getting that plush toy, I even passed out.

“Oh yeah, what about the others? Suzutsuki won, right?”

Although we were still on the same temple grounds, this was a different location from before, with no other people around. Just where did they go...

“Ahh, the awards ceremony ended, but a lot of problems

happened...”

“Problems?” I returned the question, to which Konoe showed an awkward reaction.

“The thing is, a drunk Nakuru-chan went rampant, and...”

“Urk...”

“She was under the impression that your glasses were broken or something, and went around stripping people off their clothes...and was held down. The young lady and the others went with her to defend her in court.”

“W-Will she be okay?”

“Yeah, she might have been drunk, but she wasn’t actually drinking alcohol, so with a bit of help from the young lady, she should be okay.”

“So Kureha and Masamune joined them?”

“Dad did too. With self-defence, he can stop Nakuru-chan after all.”

I see, so that glasses incident caused another ruckus in the end. Maybe I should switch to contact lenses in the near future. Or maybe not, I feel Nakuru will grow rampant if I do that.

“You had it rough, right? Suddenly participating in that contest.”

I bet the reason she won was simply because the old man was one of the judges, but I guess she was forced into it by him to begin with.

“I didn’t exactly hate it, but it was embarrassing to be turned into the prize...and I was forced to give out a kiss in front of all these people...O-Of course, it was just on the cheek though!” Konoe added at the very end.

So I guess it was Suzutsuki. She really took the most delicious part in the very end. What a clever wench she is.

“But...I got a present from the rich lady after that.” Konoe said, and

pointed at a large box with a plush toy inside...

Wait a second, that's the Silent Sheep plush toy I wanted to give Konoe as a present.

"Cute, right? Apparently it was the prize for winning the battle royale." Konoe affectionately embraced the toy.

...Damn Devil Suzutsuki. She really took all the glory. It's like she took the strawberry from the slice of cake. Even though I wanted to be the one who'd win it for her.

"...Good for you. You're feeling better now, right?" I muttered, unable to hide my frustration.

In response to that, Konoe tilted her head in confusion.

"Feeling better? Jirou, were you thinking that I was still feeling down or something?"

"...Well, you know."

You were crying at the graveyard, right. I managed to somehow cheer you up, but it's not like I did much. That's why I wanted to win a plush toy of her favorite type. However...

"You're wrong." Konoe took off the glasses she was wearing. "After all, you cheered me up."

"...Konoe."

"Back then...when I was crying, you supported me. You were being considerate of me, despite your gynophobia activating, right. That's why I was feeling much better immediately. Thank you, Jirou." Konoe declared as she smiled at me.

"W-Well, it's not that big of a deal."

"Don't say that, because you hugged me back then, I..." Konoe started blushing like she was embarrassed about something, and grew silent.

Gaaah stop with that! You'll make me feel embarrassed as well!

"S-See, we're friends, so that much is normal, right?" Unable to bear with the silence, I gave a random comment.

I feel bad for Nakuru, but...I still feel like Konoe looks better without glasses. And even without them...she's super cute already.

"...Right. We are...friends."

Even though I thought she'd cheered up, Konoe's voice grew quiet in the middle of that. Hm? Maybe I should have said kindred spirit after all? But, that'd be a bit...

"Woah!?"

As I was thinking that, the sky suddenly lit up. More and more explosions happened, breaking through the silence like loud thundering—Ahh, the fireworks started, creating flowers in the night sky.

"Oh yeah, the last event was supposed to be fireworks, alright."

More lights filled the sky...Yeah, this isn't so bad sometimes. We're at a summer festival already, so an explosive ending doesn't hurt.

"It feels like summer is about to end, right." Konoe suddenly spoke up.

"Really? We're still in the middle of August, you know."

"Yeah, you're right. But, even the rest will pass us by immediately. We only have half of a month left. It's a bit sad that it's going to end so soon, but once the second term starts, I'll get to spend time with Jirou and the young lady again at school, so—I'm looking forward to it."

"I feel like it's a bit of a shame."

As your average student, I find myself wishing that summer break could continue forever. However, that won't do. Because eventually, school will restart again.

“Well, I bet the second term will get even more noisy. I’ve gotten used to it though. Don’t you agree? And of course, we’ll always be friends.”

I guess this is the end of the first-term arc, with summer break as a bit of a break. We just have to get back on our daily lives once again.

“...I wonder.”

However, Konoe suddenly denied my words. I wanted to ask what exactly she meant by that, but she just turned her back towards me, and walked around the empty temple grounds. Almost like she was making her way towards the dancing fireworks.

“...I realized.” Her words barely reached me because of the fireworks.

However, she didn’t stop, and kept on walking.

“When you hugged me back then, I realized. You were bearing with your symptoms in order to help me...and seeing that, I realized my own feelings.”

“...Konoe?”

Because of the distance between us, I had trouble understanding what she said. Beneath the August summer night sky, filled with loud bangs, Konoe suddenly turned around, with flowers at her back.

“—I don’t want that.”

Wearing a yukata, the butler in front of me tried her best to convey this one sentence.

“—I don’t want us to be just friends anymore...!”



Afterword

Been a while! It's me, the guy who got his first ride on an ambulance the other day, named Asano Hajime.

Yes, you heard me right, I actually suffered from light anemia. Maybe that was caused by my long RPG marathon, I just happened to feel dizzy in the fish aisle of the supermarket, and was brought to the hospital before I realized it...Naturally, the BGM I was wearing when collapsing was [Osa*ana Tengoku¹]. I seriously thought I'd get dragged up to heaven. Imagine me getting summoned to heaven with the horse mackerel I was about to buy for dinner.

When I told my editor about this, he gave me yet another warm retort along the lines of 'Are you okay!? Did you properly get looked at!? Also, you really don't have to go all out to create material for the novel, okay!'. I can't blame him, he's not wrong. Still, let alone messing up my condition because of the approaching deadline, I can't believe I was transported with the ambulance because of something like this...Passing out without even being hugged by a girl...I guess these situations only work for a certain chicken bastard.

And to get back to the main topic with this, we've made it through the 4th installment of [Mayo Chiki!]. This time around, we had a clear summer break arc. With this releasing around September, it was a perfect timing. With the main cast finally assembled in the past volume, we have them now enjoy a classic romcom with swimsuits, yukata, hot springs, etc. To the people who are still unsure of wanting to buy this, I'd be happy if you slammed this on the cash register with a Frankensteiner move!

Now, my thanks. First of course is my editor Shouji-sama. I'm very sorry that I made you worry like that when I collapsed. I'll try to be more mindful of my help, so I hope you forgive me.

Following that, I want to thank Kikuchi Seiji-sama for creating such a wonderful big-breasted cat-ears character. You always provide me with wonderful illustrations in your busy times. I'll try my best so

that my writing will one day be worthy of your illustrations.

To the editor-in-chief Misaka-sama, everybody from the editorial department, the proofreaders, the designers, the people involved with printing and selling, all the others who helped me, and NEET-sensei who is responsible for the manga, not forgetting all my dear readers out there, you are the reason why I get to eat my food tonight, so thank you very much.

Now for the preview of the next volume, I have planned to make the 5th volume happen during the later half of the summer break, in a short-story principle. Of course, it will probably move the main story forward, so rest assured.

And finally, some great news! Haruno Tomoya-sensei's [D-Frag!] series that is being publicized in the Monthly Comic Alive has been granted the privilege of receiving a drama CD, and I was chosen to write the script for such! In response to this, I received a wonderful illustration at the end of this volume, so I cannot thank them enough. It will be released on the same day as this novel, the 23rd of July, and the topic is 'The characters are creating their own drama CD'. I would be very happy if you checked it out!

At the same time, the start of [Mayo Chiki!]’s manga adaptation also overlaps with the July magazine of Monthly Comic Alive, drawn by NEET-sensei. The characters are all adorable, so I hope you check it out!

Now then, with the support from all of you, I get to step on the gas yet again, so I'll be seeing you on the other side again if possible.

Asano Hajime



1 Some CM for fish or something lel

Credits

Translation Group: CClaw Translations

EPUB is done by JLN

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